



US007765685B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Brown

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 7,765,685 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Aug. 3, 2010**

(54) **APPARATUS FOR TRANSPORTING PIPE FORMED FROM PIPE SEGMENTS**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 1299 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **11/249,074**

(22) Filed: **Oct. 11, 2005**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2006/0201987 A1 Sep. 14, 2006

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 60/650,946, filed on Feb. 7, 2005.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
B23P 19/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **29/819**; 226/181

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 29/819, 29/822; 226/177, 181
See application file for complete search history.

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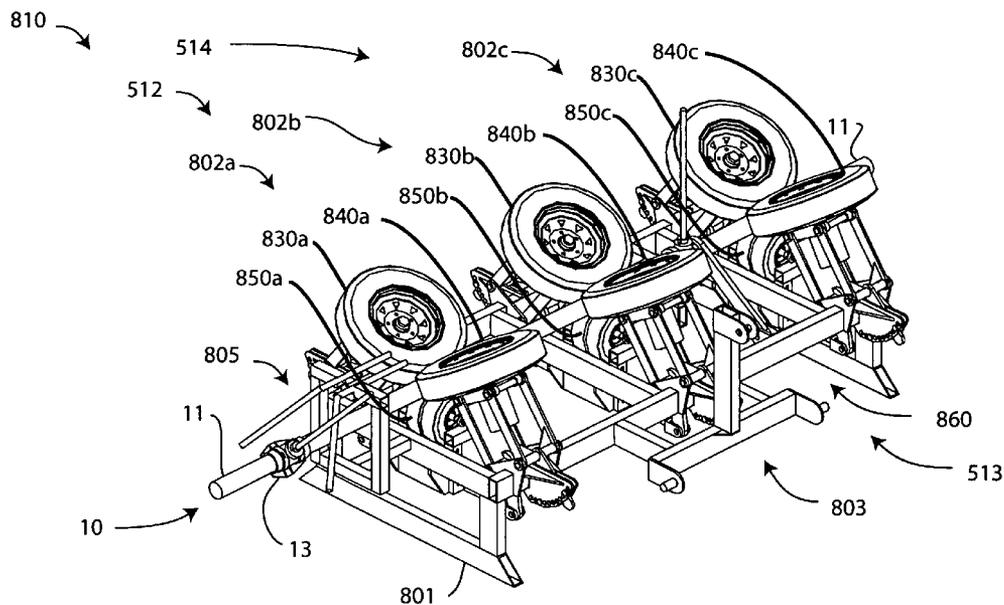
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An apparatus and method are described for assembling and disassembling pipe. The device has a drive mechanism that be used to either assemble or disassemble pipe. The drive mechanism has two independent traction drives that can independently impart longitudinal forces on a pipe, either in the same or opposing directions. The drive unit can thus transport pipe or can facilitate the assembly of pipe from modular units or the disassembly of pipe into modular units. The method includes pulling or pushing pipe from the field from a fixed location with a traction device.

26 Claims, 20 Drawing Sheets



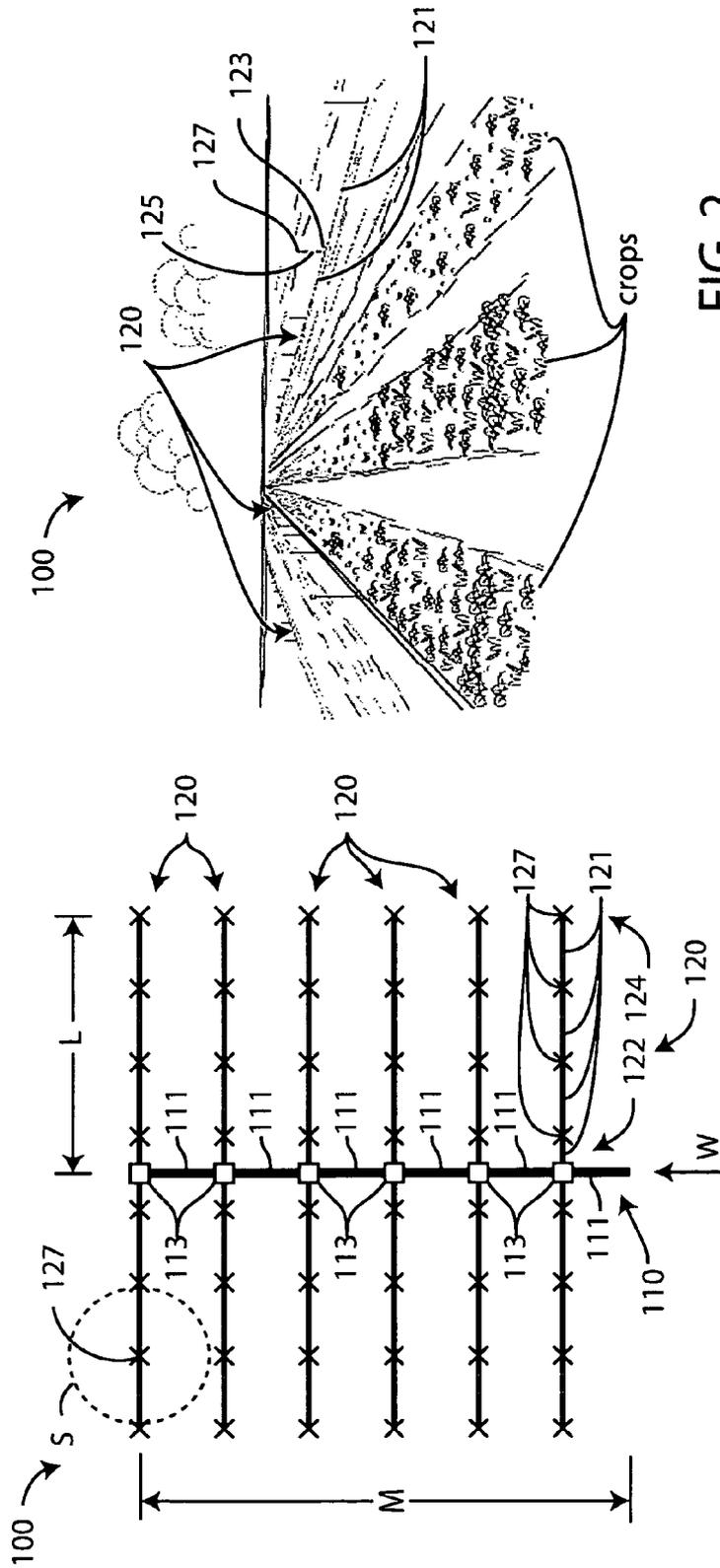


FIG. 1
(prior art)

FIG. 2
(prior art)

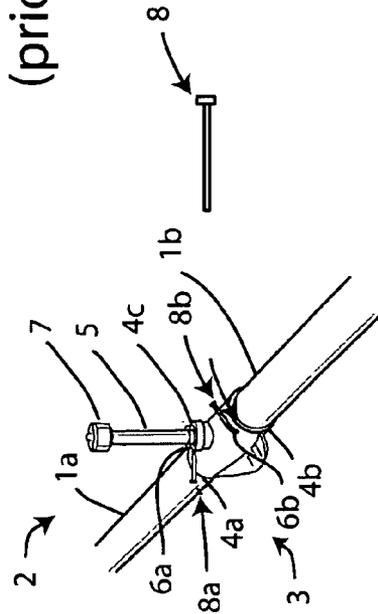


FIG. 3
(prior art)

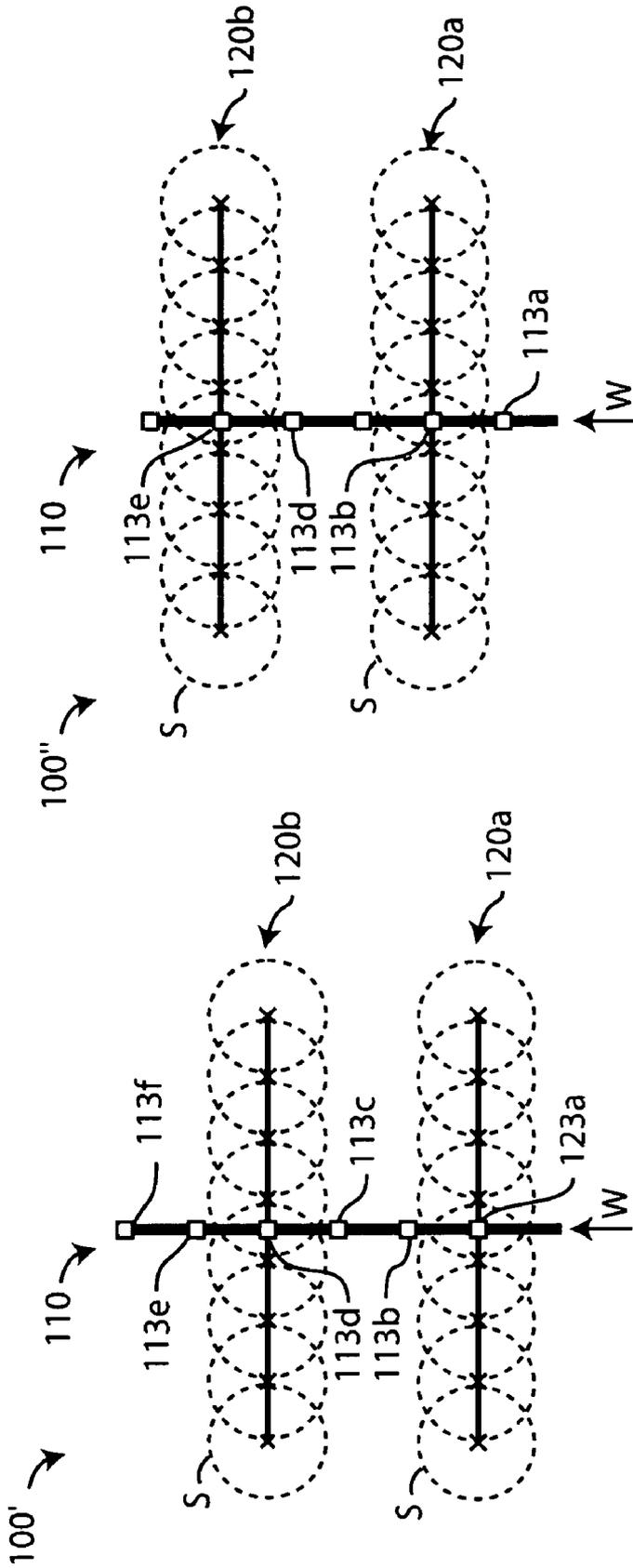


FIG. 4B
(prior art)

FIG. 4A
(prior art)

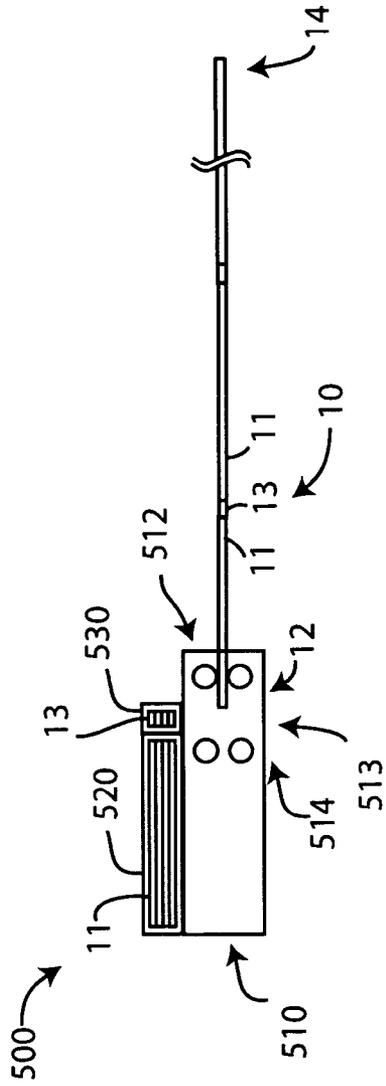


FIG. 5A

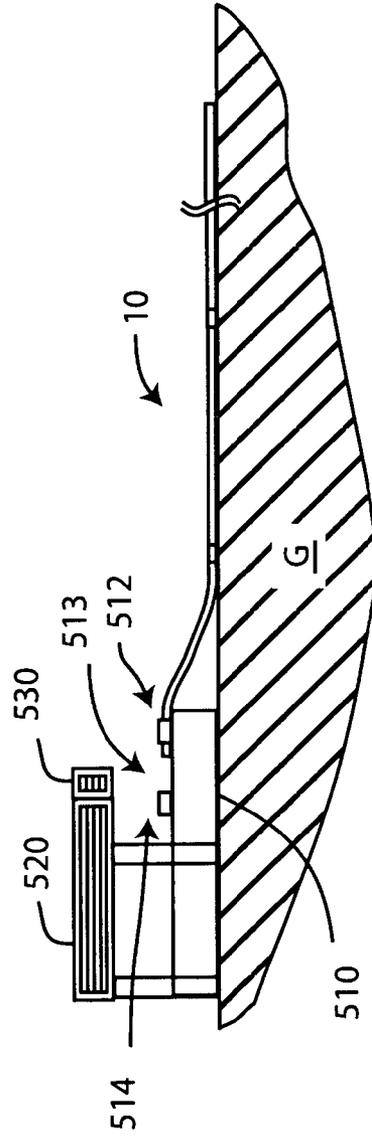


FIG. 5B

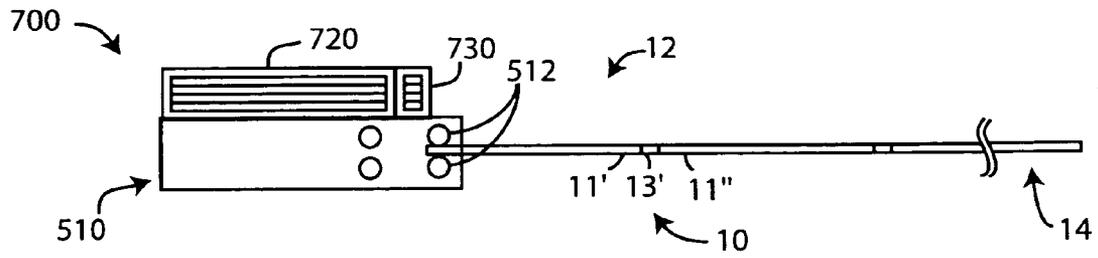


FIG. 7A

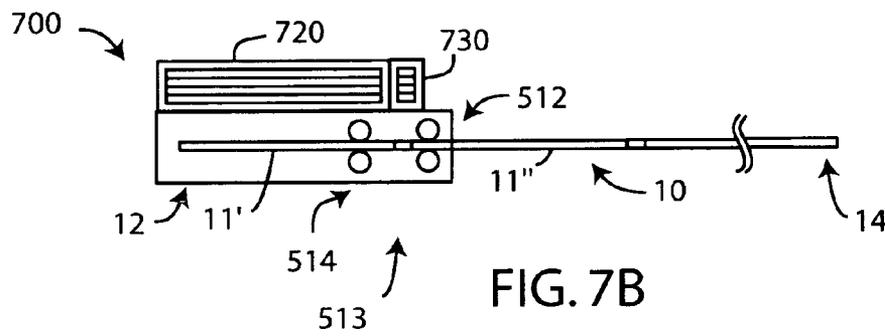


FIG. 7B

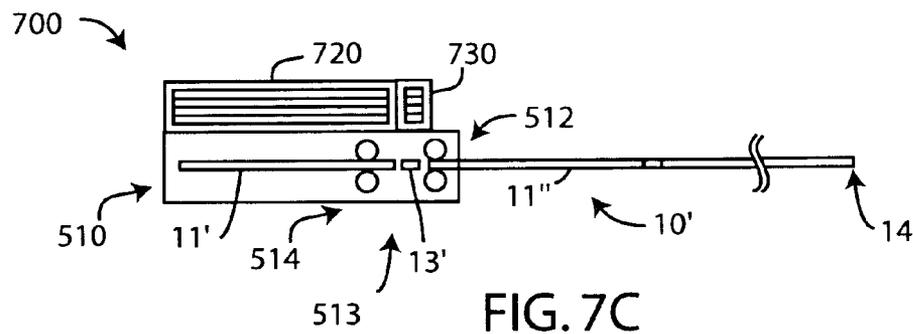


FIG. 7C

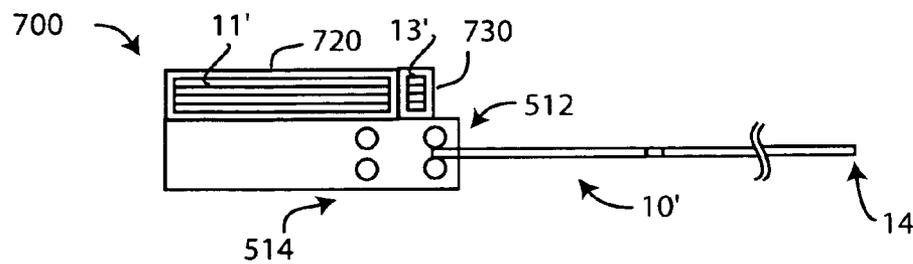


FIG. 7D

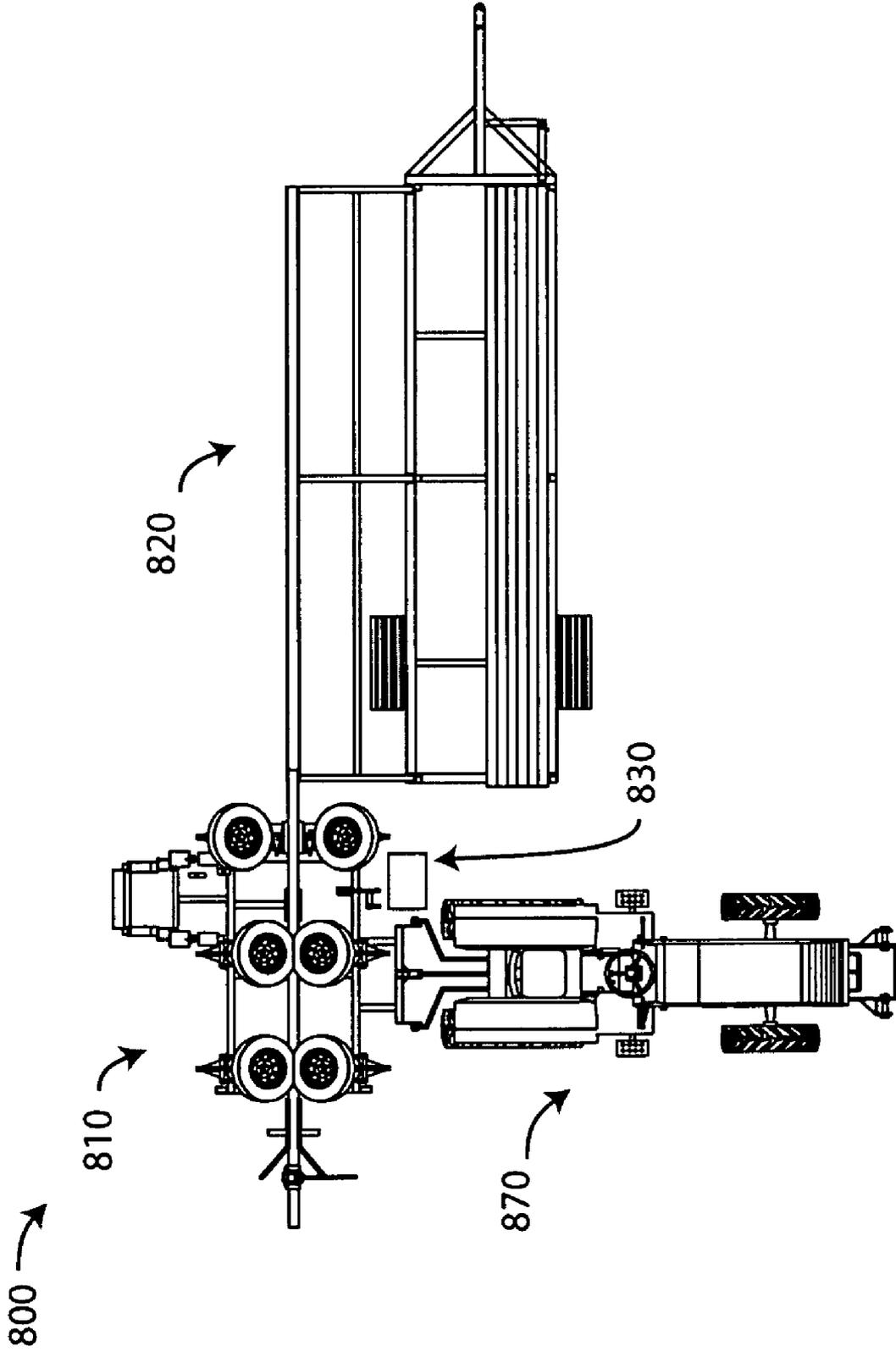


FIG. 8

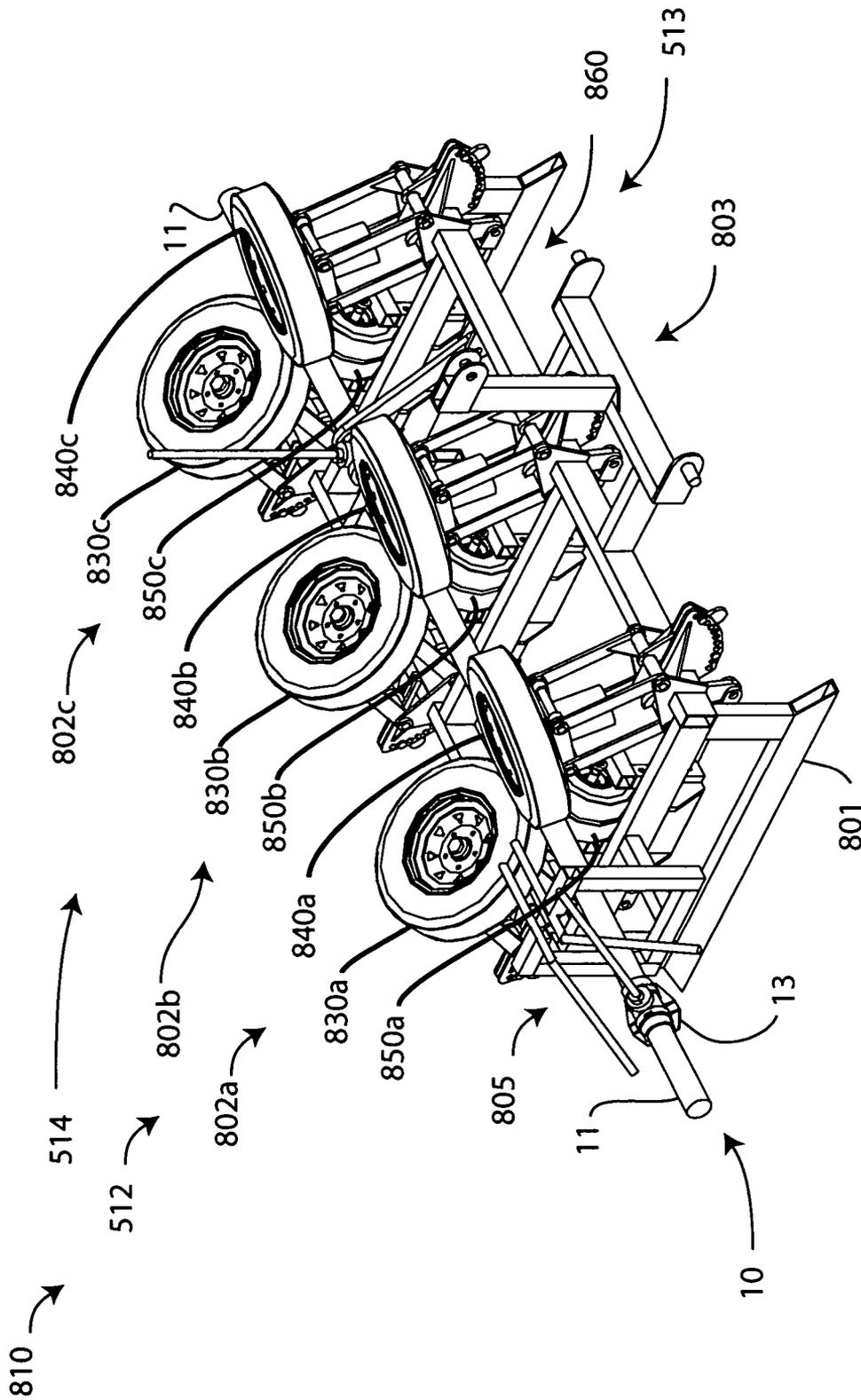


FIG. 10

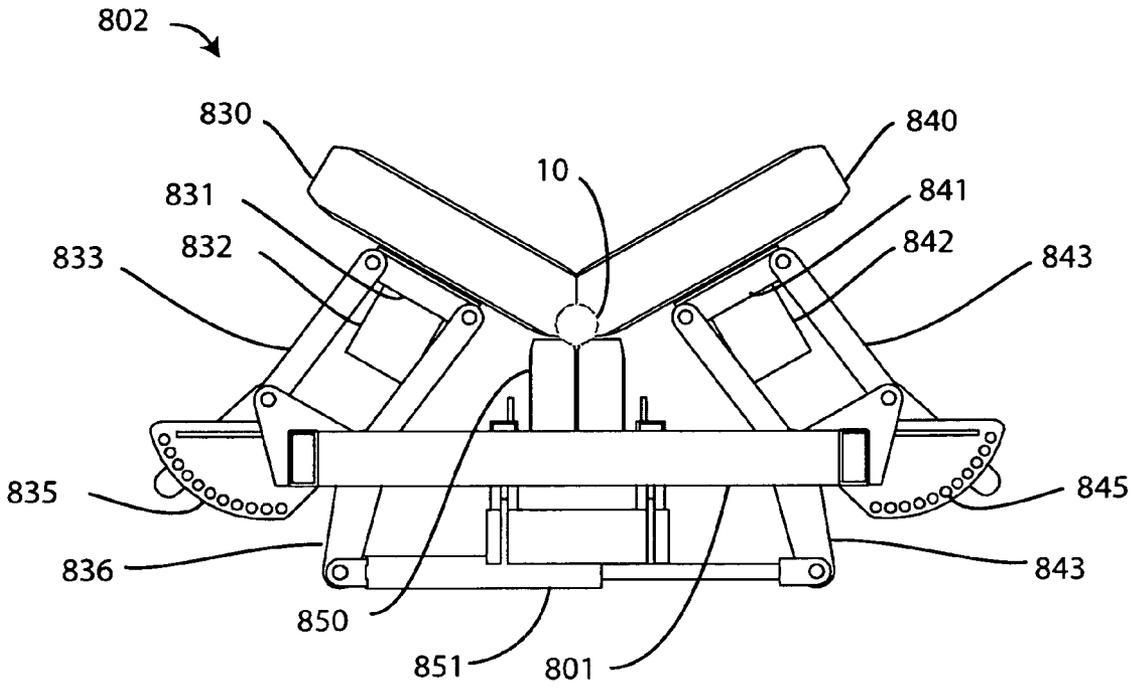


FIG. 11

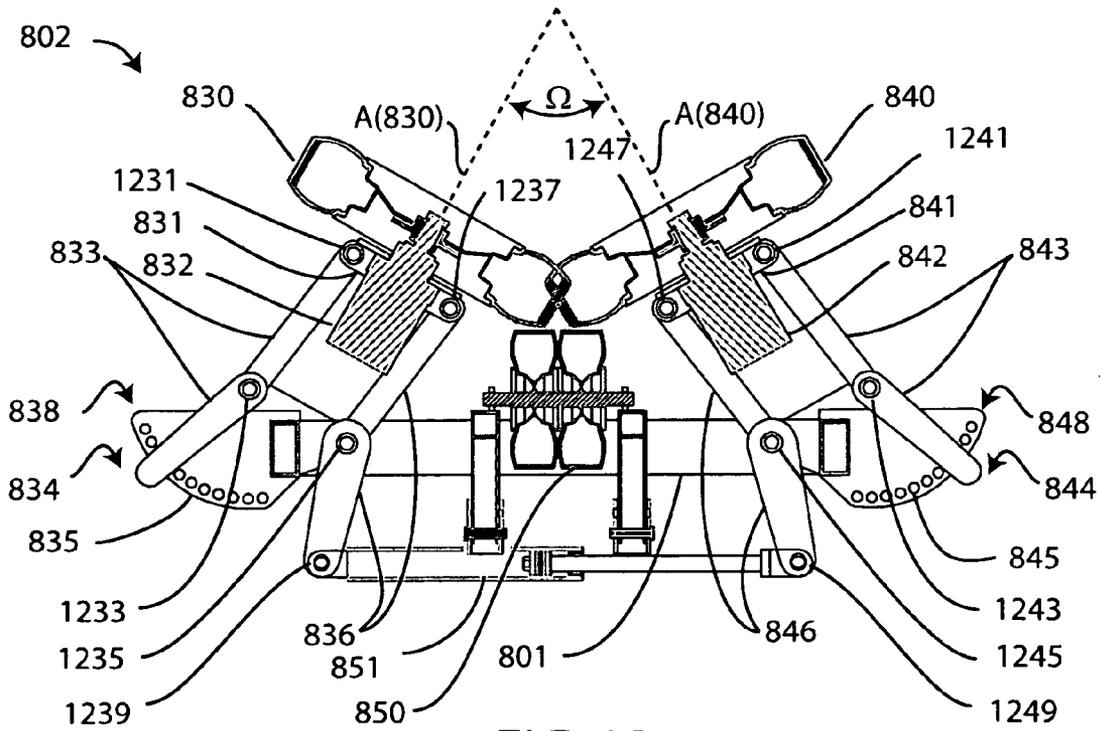


FIG. 12

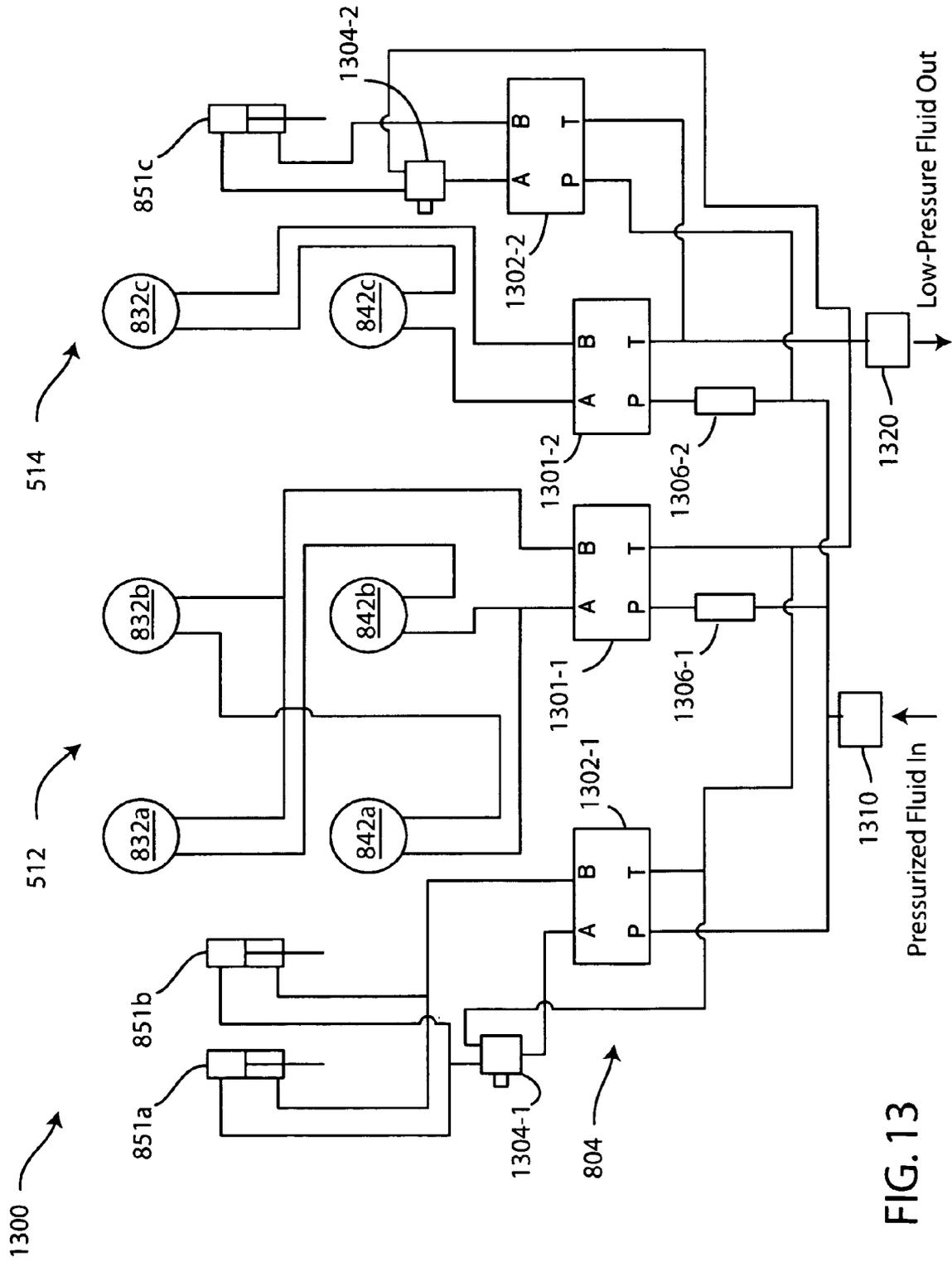


FIG. 13

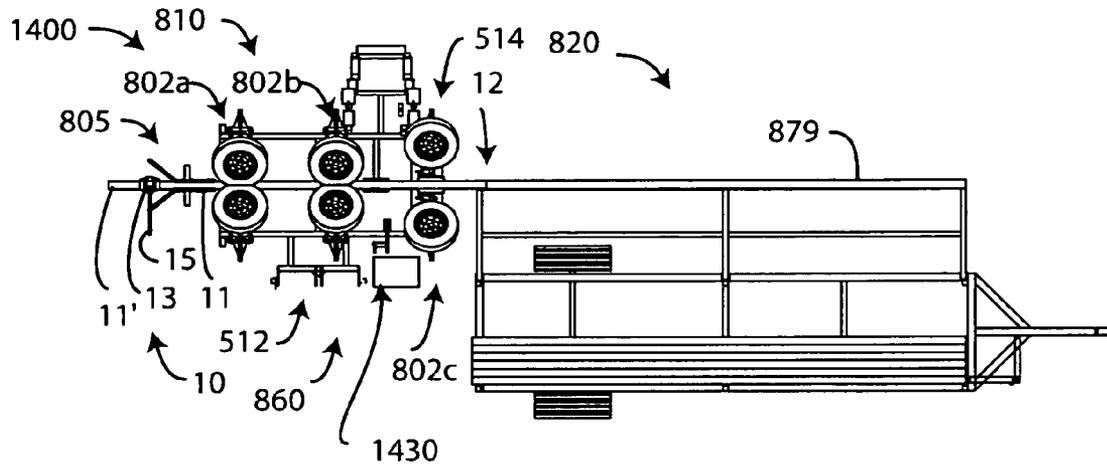


FIG. 14A

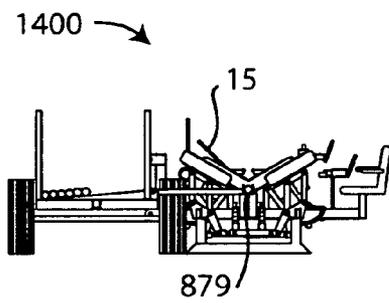


FIG. 14B

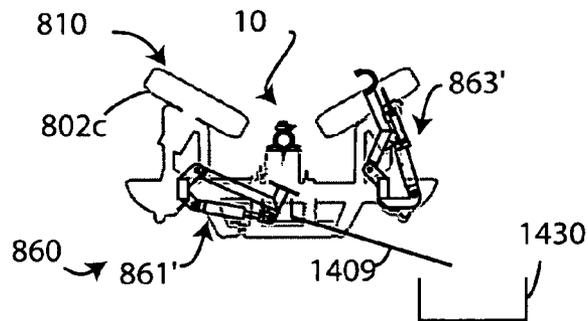


FIG. 14C

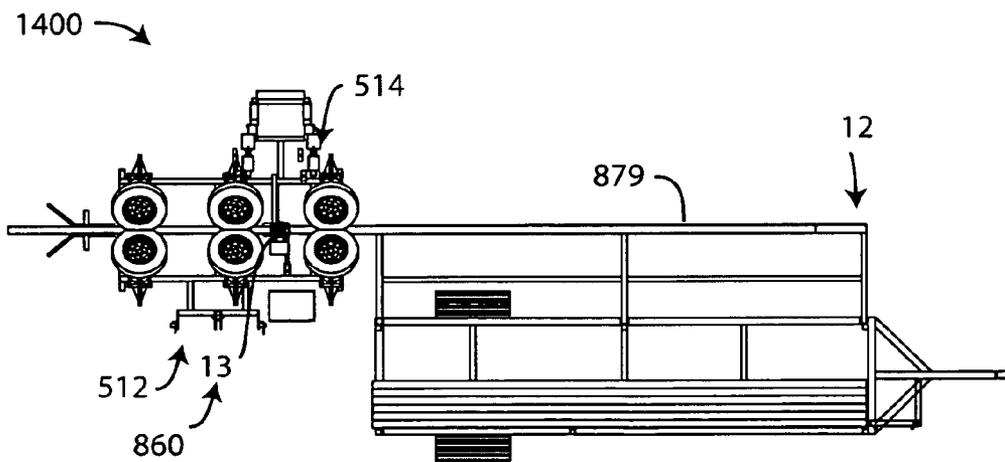


FIG. 15A

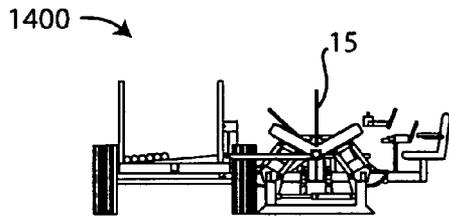


FIG. 15B

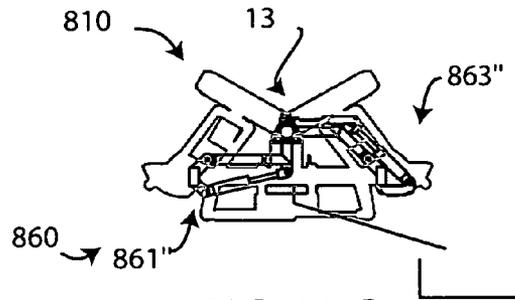


FIG. 15C

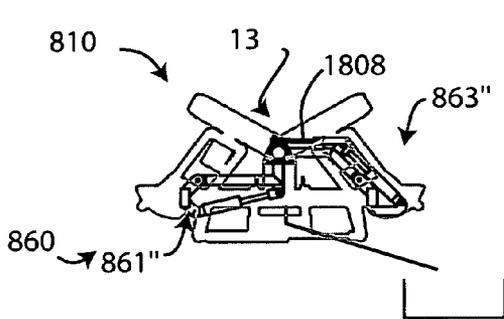


FIG. 15D

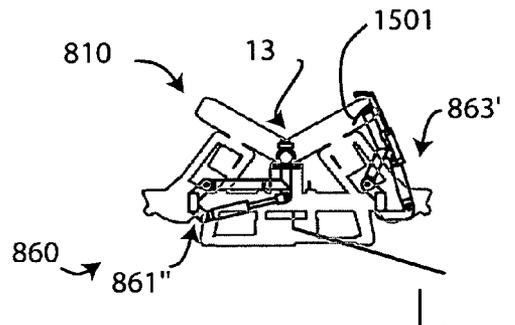


FIG. 15E

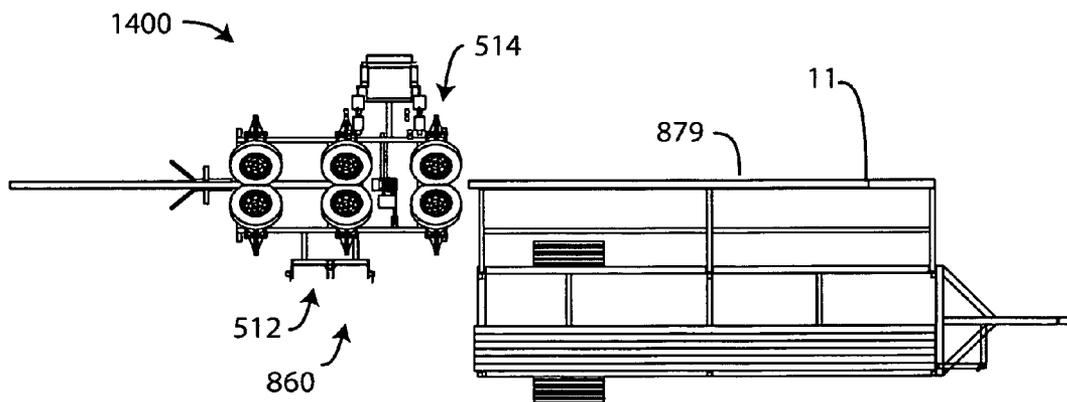


FIG. 16A

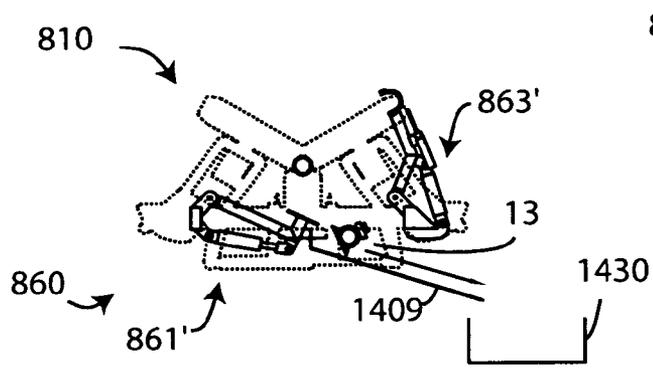


FIG. 16B

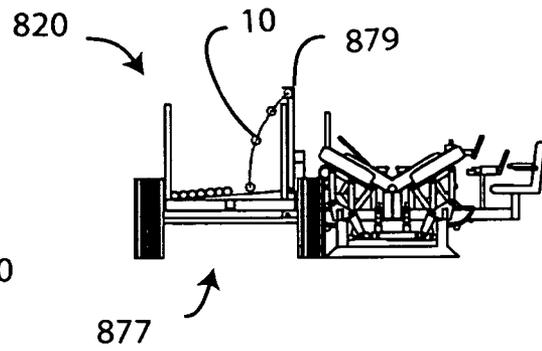


FIG. 17

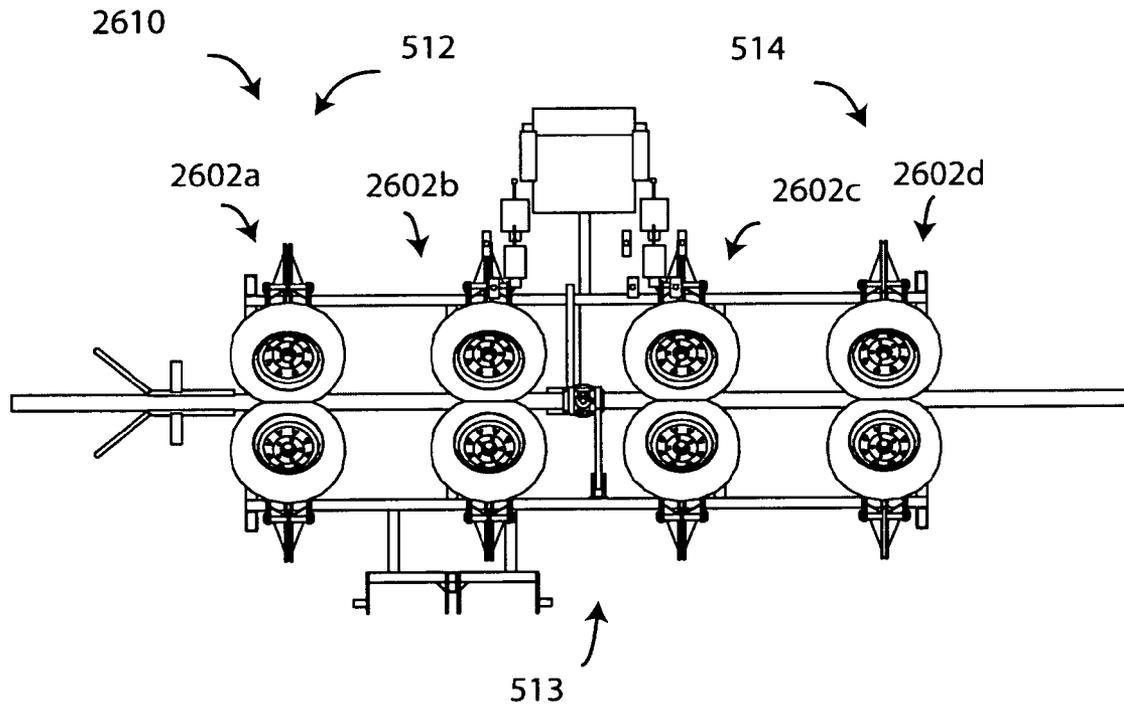


FIG. 26

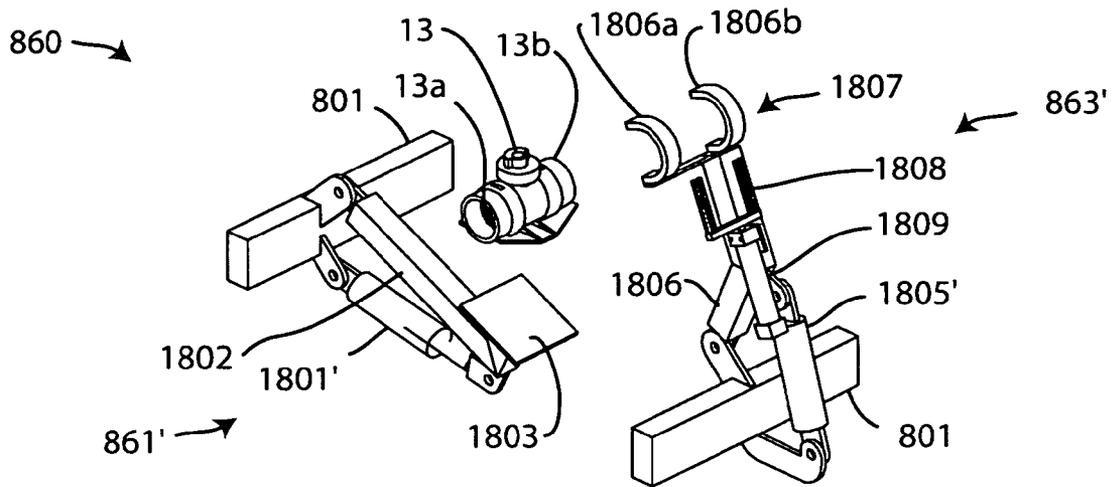


FIG. 18A

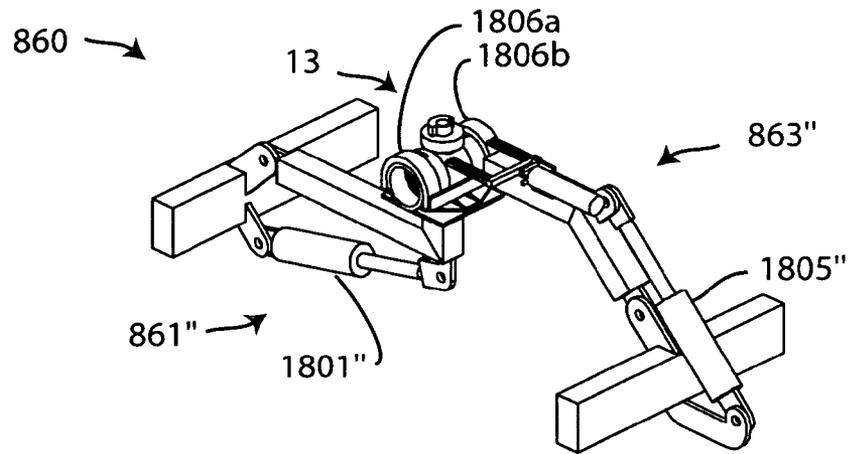


FIG. 18B

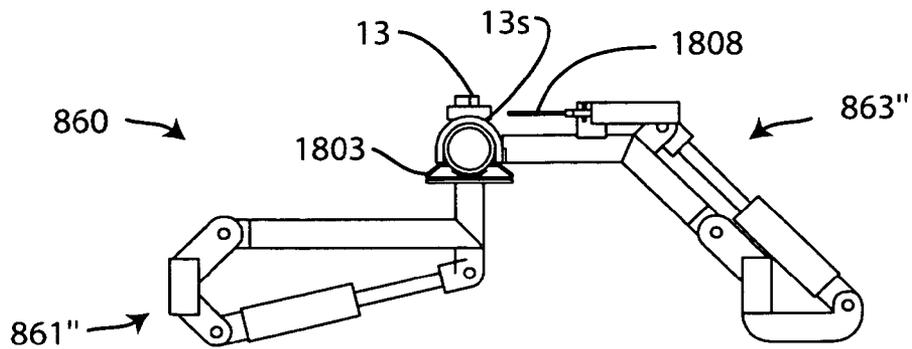


FIG. 18C

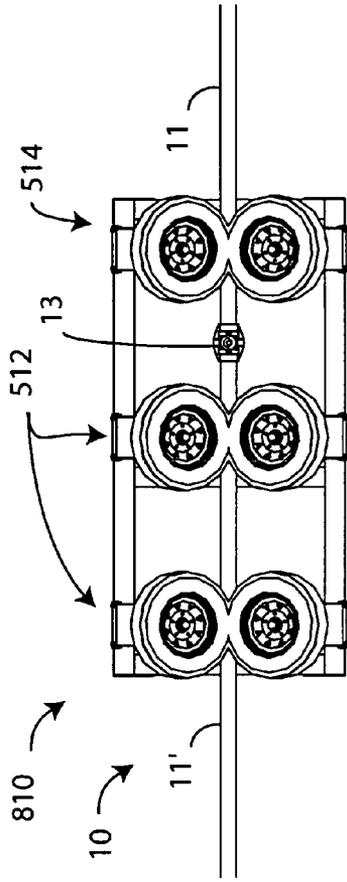


FIG. 19A

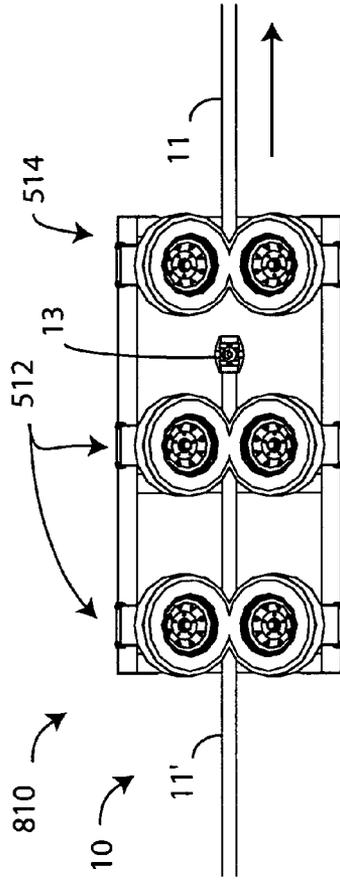


FIG. 19B

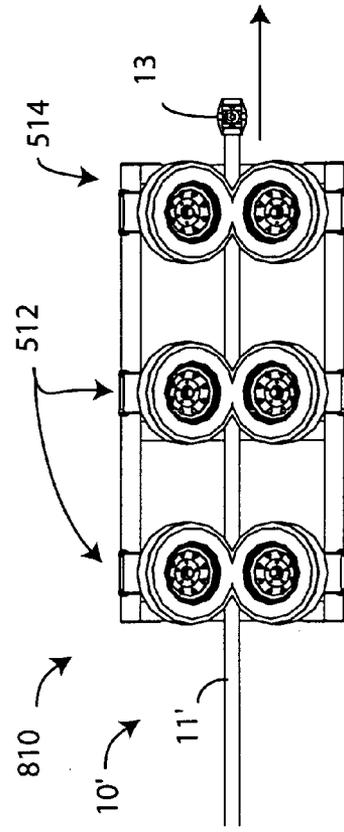


FIG. 19C

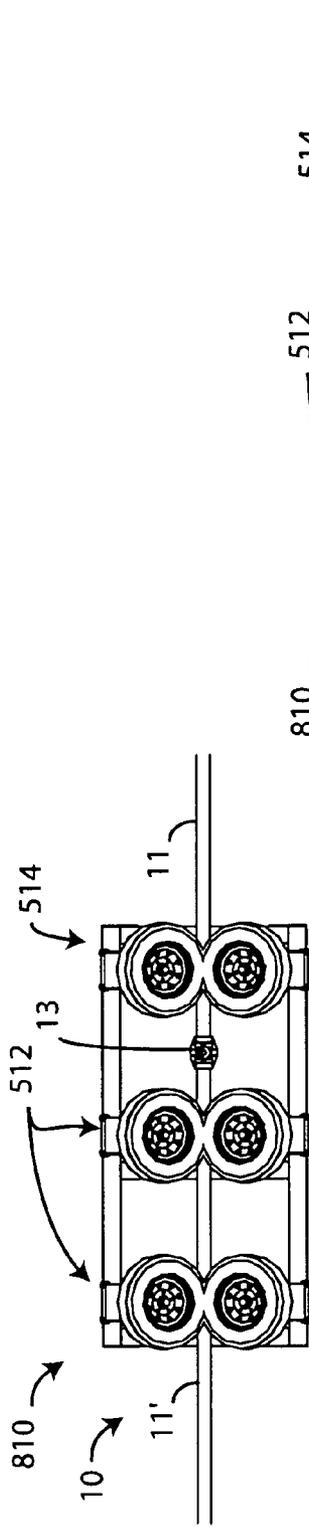


FIG. 20A

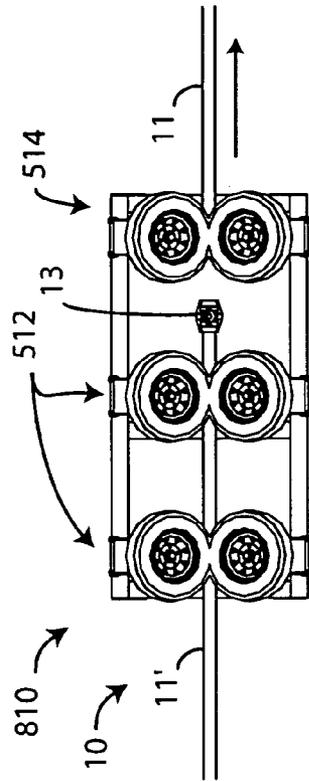


FIG. 20B

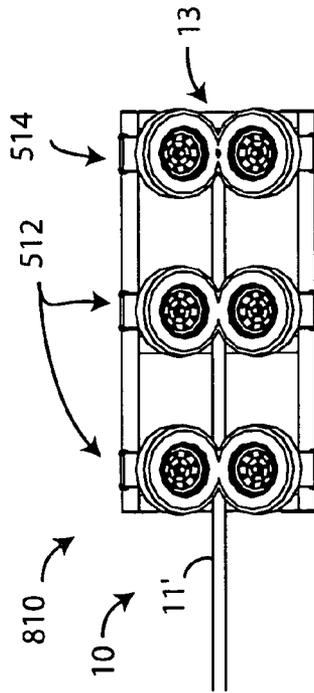


FIG. 20C

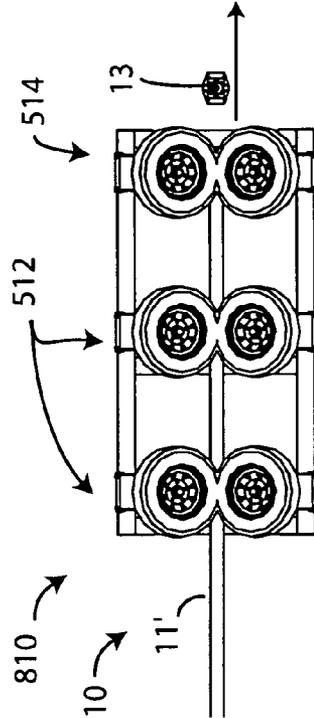


FIG. 20D

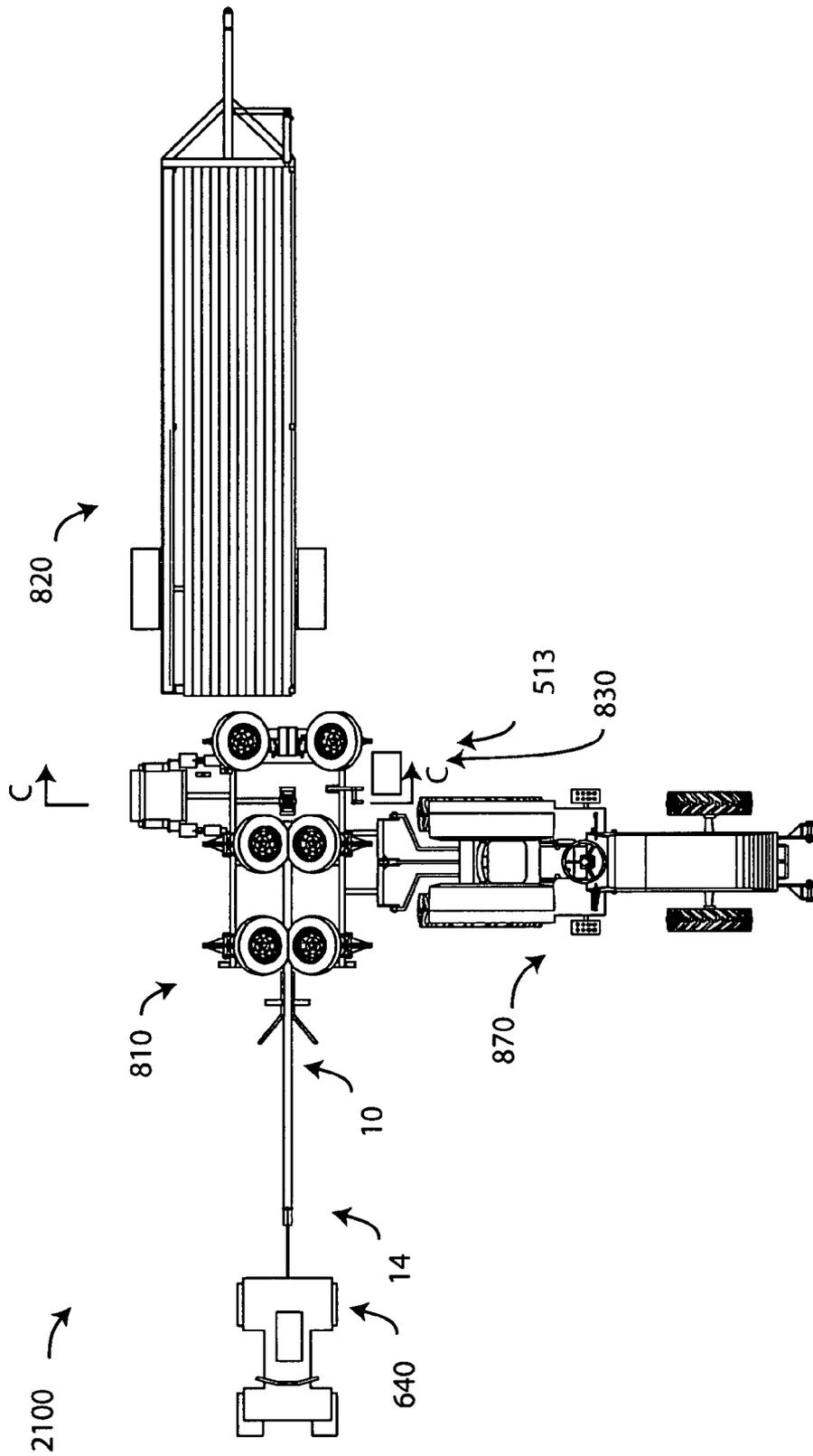


FIG. 21

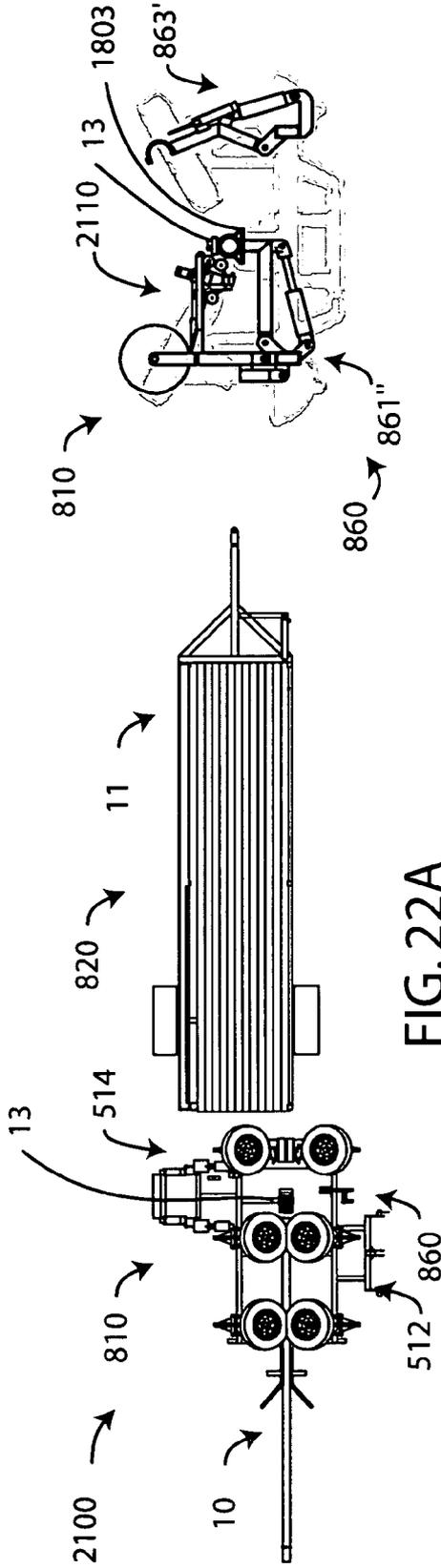


FIG. 22A

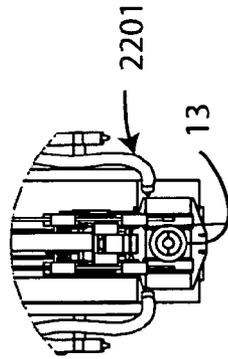


FIG. 22C

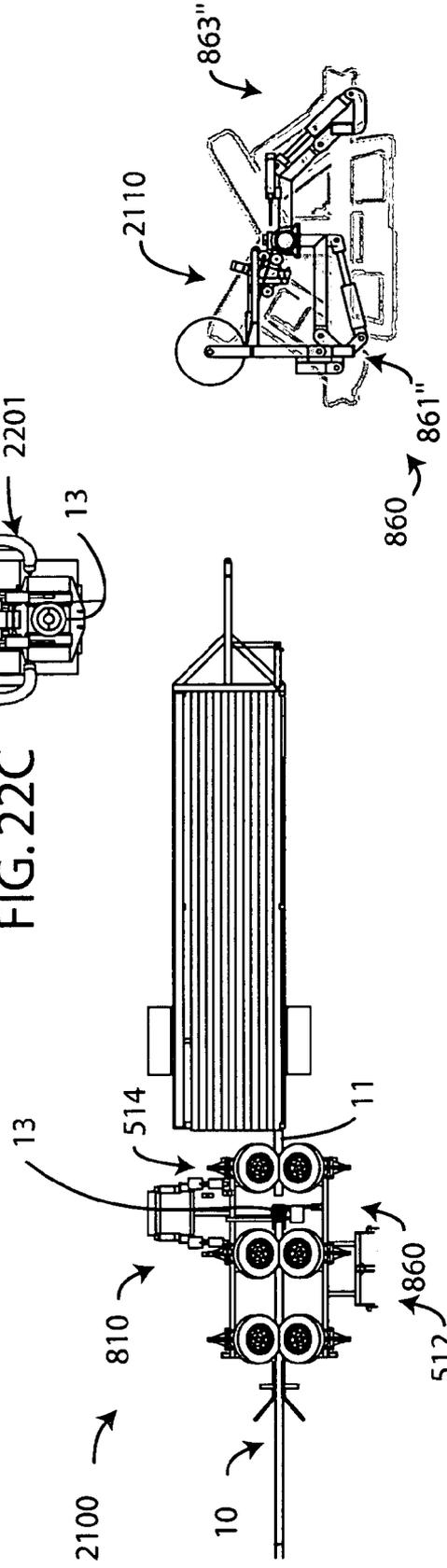


FIG. 23A

FIG. 22B

FIG. 23B

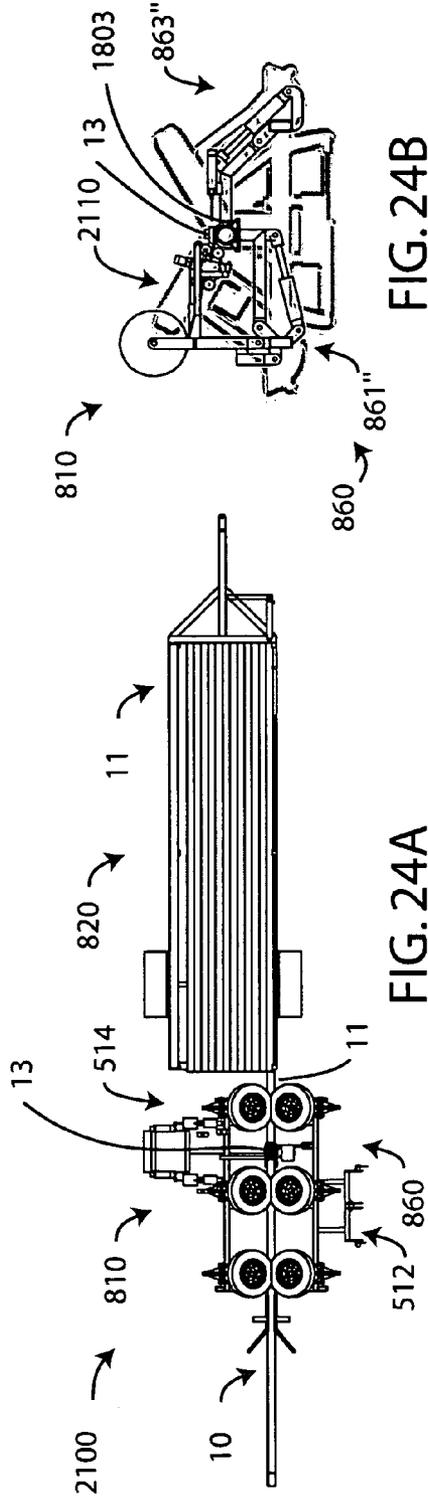


FIG. 24A

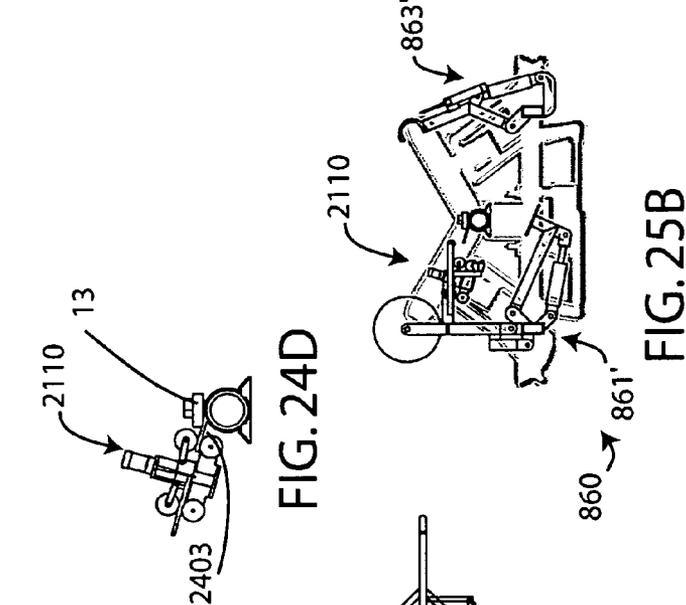


FIG. 24B

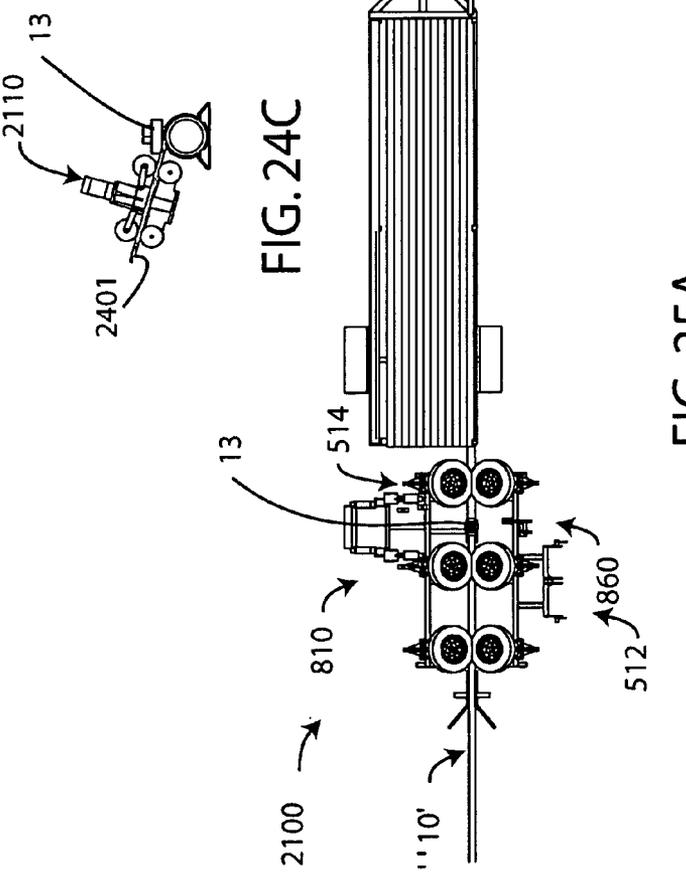


FIG. 24C



FIG. 24D

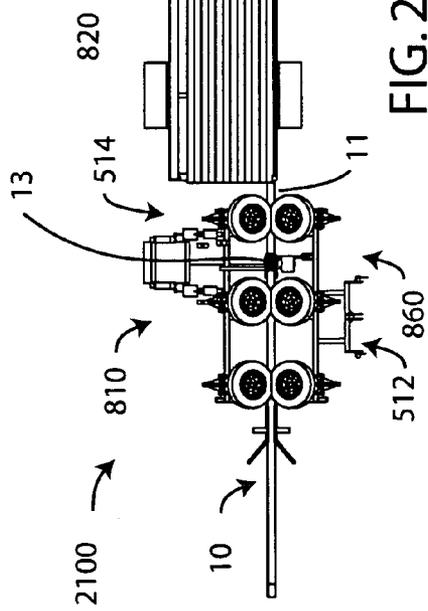


FIG. 25A

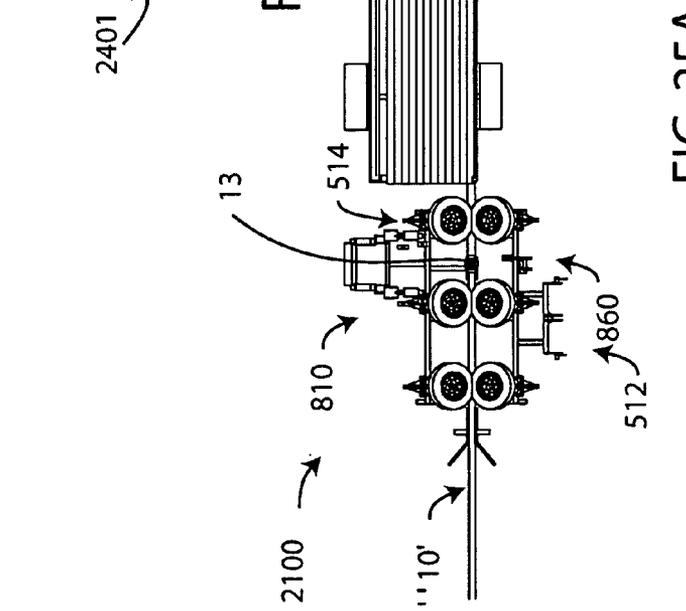


FIG. 25B

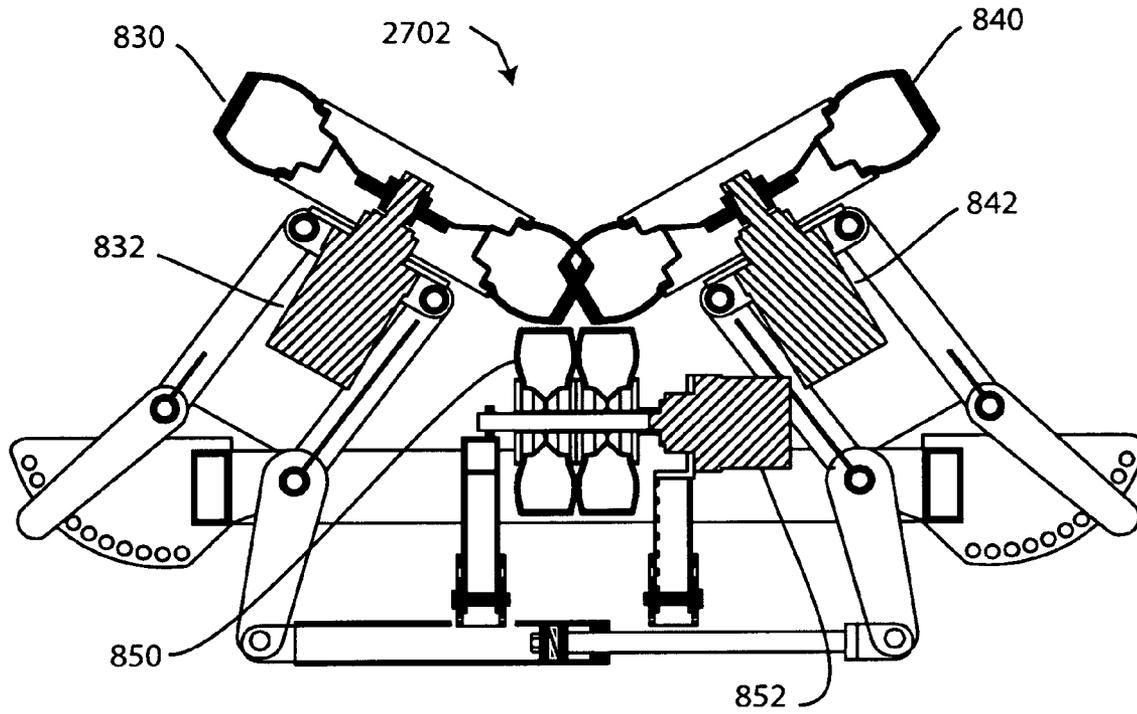


FIG. 27

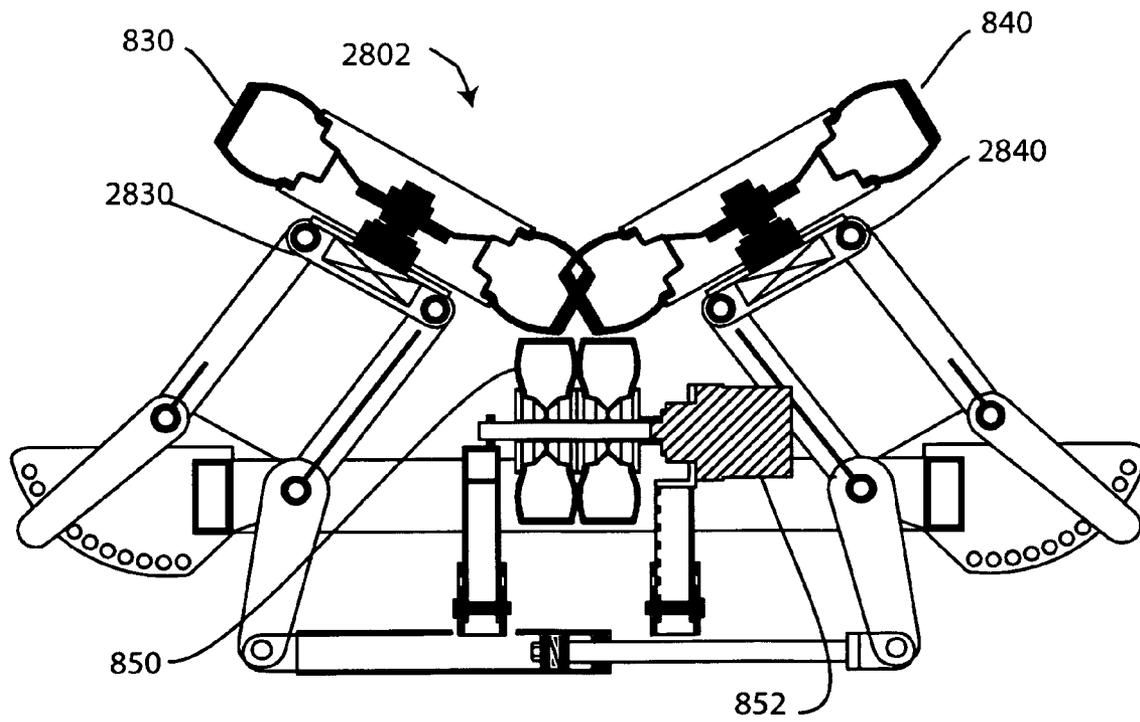


FIG. 28

APPARATUS FOR TRANSPORTING PIPE FORMED FROM PIPE SEGMENTS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/650,946, filed Feb. 7, 2005, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to devices and methods for manipulating piping, and more particularly to a method and system for assembly and disassembly of pipes in and on the ground.

2. Discussion of the Background

In many agricultural and horticultural settings, rigid, above-ground, portable sprinkler systems are used for irrigation of crops, pasture, trees, or grasses, etc. These systems have, over the years, replaced many other forms of irrigation, such as flood irrigation, because they minimize erosion, prevent many drainage problems, do not require land leveling, and generally provide a uniform application of moisture to irrigate crops on a variety of terrains and minimal management expertise while conserving water. Sprinkler irrigation systems are typically constructed from modular sections of either aluminum or polyvinyl chloride (PVC) that include pipes, risers, sprinkler heads and connectors that are assembled and disassembled in the field as needed.

One common irrigation system, often called a "solid-set" system, includes a main line that provides water to a plurality of lateral irrigation lines. Each lateral line has a plurality of sprinkler heads positioned to irrigate a field. In some solid-set systems, the lateral lines provide water to the entire field. Other solid-set systems, the lateral lines provide water to only a portion of the field, and the lateral lines are disassembled and then reassembled at different positions along the main line as needed. When the irrigation season is over, the solid-set system may be disconnected and stored so that the crops may be harvested and the ground may be worked in preparation for the next growing season.

Examples of prior art solid-set irrigation systems are shown in FIGS. 1-4 where: FIG. 1 shows a top schematic view of a system 100 for irrigating a field with a single set-up; FIGS. 4A and 4B show top schematic views of another prior art solid-set irrigation system using multiple set-ups as a first system 100' and a second system 100"; FIG. 2 is a perspective view of FIGS. 1, 4A and 4B, and FIG. 3 is a perspective view of a specific coupler.

With reference to FIG. 1, system 100 includes a main line 110 that accepts a flow of water W from a pump (not shown) and that has a length M over which water is delivered to several lateral irrigation lines 120 each having a length L and arranged parallel on a field. Thus, for example, it is common to use a solid-set irrigation system to irrigate row crops having, for example, lateral lines with sprinkler heads on 30 or 40 foot linear spacing and 40 feet between lateral lines, and the length L can be from 20 feet to half a mile. Typically, the diameter of irrigation main line 110 is from 6 to 12 inches and the diameter of lateral lines 120 are from 1½ to 4 inches. Alternatively, the length and/or pattern of lateral lines 120 can be different from line to line to irrigate an irregular shaped plot of land.

With reference to FIGS. 4A and 4B, first and second systems 100' and 100" have a main line with several connectors

(113a, 113b, 113c, 113d, 113e, and 113f) and two lateral lines (120a and 120b). By moving lateral lines 120a and 120b from the position shown in system 100' to the position shown in system 100" the entire field may be irrigated by sequentially watering different portions at a time. Thus system 100' has lateral line 120a joined to connector 113a and lateral line 120b is joined to connector 113d, irrigating only a portion of the field. At a later time, the solid-set system is reconfigured as system 100", with lateral line 120a joined to connector 113b and lateral line 120b is joined to connector 113e, thus irrigating a different portion of the field.

Irrigation systems 100, 100', and 100" are formed from a collection of modular pipe, coupler, and sprinkler segments. Thus, for example, main line 110 includes a plurality of main line pipe segments 111, with adjacent segments are joined by one of a plurality of couplers 113. Each lateral line 120 includes a plurality of lateral pipe segments 121, with adjacent segments joined by one of a plurality of couplers 123. Each lateral line 120 extends length L from an end 112 that is connected to main line 120 at one of couplers 123 to another end 114. As shown in FIG. 2, each connector 123 is also attached to a riser 125 that protrude from the field and terminates with a sprinkler head 127. Commonly used materials include aluminum, polyethylene, or PVC tubing, and stainless steel and/or polyethylene or nylon fittings.

One particularly useful solid-set irrigation system includes tubing and couplers of PVC, such as the YELOMINE™ CERTA-LOK™ main line and the YELOMINE™ CERTA-SET™ lateral line systems, manufactured by the Certain Teed Corporation, Pipe and Plastics Group, Valley Forge, Pa. In these solid-set systems, pipe segments are joined using coupling devices that allow for rapid breakdown and packaging of the system. This system is particularly easy to use, as the pipes are spline-coupled—that is, they are held together with "splines" that are inserted into the coupler. The couplers include an o-ring to seal against an accepted pipe, and the couplers and pipe ends have matching circumferential grooves for accepting the spline. The spline is a flexible elongated strip that fits within the matching circumferential grooves and that, when inserted, keeps the joint together by preventing relative lateral motion.

An example of a CERTA-LOK™ or CERTA-SET™ pipe and coupler is illustrated in the perspective view of FIG. 3. A pipe 2, such as lateral line 120, is shown as being formed from tube or pipe segments 1, indicated as a first pipe segment 1a and a second pipe segment 1b joined by a coupler 3. Coupler 3 also includes an adapter 4c for accepting lateral pipes, such as a riser 5 terminated by a sprinkler head 7. Alternatively, pipe 2 can be main line 110 with adapter 4c configured to accept a lateral line 120, or coupler 3 can be configured to joint adjacent segments without an adapter to another pipe or riser.

Coupler 3 has a first end 4a for accepting first pipe segment 1a and a hole 6a for inserting a spline 8, such as a first spline 8a, and a second end 4b for accepting second pipe segment 1b and a hole 6b for inserting spline 8, such as a second spline 8b. When each end 4a, 4b accepts an end of a pipe segment 1a, 1b, grooves within each end and the corresponding end of pipe segment 1a, 1b form a groove for accepting an inserted spline 8a, 8b to laterally restrain the pipe segments. Removal of a spline 8 allows for removal of the corresponding pipe segment 1 from the coupler.

When properly seated, the groove can accept a spline that is removably insertable through the side of the coupler. An accepted spline nearly encircles the pipe and coupler and prevents relative longitudinal movement of the pipe and coupler. Coupling is accomplished by pushing the pipe and cou-

pler together and inserting a spline. Decoupling is accomplished by pulling a spline from the coupler of a coupled pipe and pulling the pipe and couplers apart. A sprinkler having a reactionary drive mechanism may be coupled to any of the couplers through quick coupling risers, or by pinning or threading.

The assembly or disassembly of solid-set irrigation systems is commonly performed by arranging pipe segments and coupling or decoupling them, respectively. The assembly and disassembly is usually performed manually in the field. Although the advent of PVC solid-set irrigation systems is lighter and couples more easily than metal irrigation systems, such systems still require considerable time and effort for assembling and disassembling. This work includes the placement and movement of heavy and bulky pipe segments that requires teams of workers. After irrigation the pipe segments are embedded in the mud, making movement difficult. The manual manipulation of piping requires a lot of work that is difficult to do on a timely basis. Occasionally the work results in injury to the workers and delays due to mud in the field.

Some devices have been proposed to automate the assembly irrigation pipes. These systems require the movement of pipe segments, couplers and risers across the field. Such systems are not useful for systems requiring the movement of lateral lines during a growing season since the use of the devices would disrupt large portions of the cultivated field.

Other devices have been proposed to automate the disassembly of irrigation pipes by grabbing portions of the pipe and pull them out of the field. These systems can damage piping and are not useful for assembling pipe. In addition, these other devices are typically too wide to fit the existing head lands of the field.

While the use of solid-set irrigation systems has greatly improved the ability to irrigate, and while plastic piping, such as PVC piping has made such systems more robust and easier to assemble and disassemble, there are still several problems. Thus, for example, the assembly and disassembly is either performed manually by teams of workers or by proposed devices that are not useful for all uses and applications.

Thus there is a need in the art for a method and apparatus that permits for the easy assembly and disassembly of modular piping systems. Such a method and apparatus should be compatible with existing piping systems, be useful for a variety of solid-set irrigation set-ups, facilitate the coupling or decoupling of pipe components, and should not damage the pipe or components. There is also a need for a system and method for removing piping from the field while the field is still wet.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention overcomes the disadvantages of prior art by providing a device and method for moving, assembling and disassembling pipes assembled from modular units.

The present invention overcomes the limitations and problems of the prior art using two or more independently controllable drive units that engages the outer surface of the pipe and pipe components, and that facilitates coupling and decoupling of the pipe.

It is one aspect of the present invention to provide a device having a drive that can transport pipe and that can push and pull pipe components to aid in coupling or decoupling of the pipes.

It is another aspect of the present invention to provide a device having two independently controlled drive mecha-

nisms. The drive mechanisms are configured to apply longitudinal forces to a pipe in either the same or opposing directions.

It is another aspect of the present invention to provide a method for assembling pipe in the field. The method includes feeding pipe segments into a drive mechanism that couples the segment into an existing length of pipe, and then transporting the pipe into the field.

It is yet another aspect of the present invention to provide a method for disassembling pipe in the field. The method includes pulling the pipe from the field through a drive mechanism that also decouples the pipe into segments.

These features together with the various ancillary provisions and features which will become apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description, are attained by the exercise device of the present invention, preferred embodiments thereof being shown with reference to the accompanying drawings, by way of example only, wherein:

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING

FIG. 1 is a top schematic view of a prior art solid-set irrigation system arrangement;

FIG. 2 is perspective view of a prior art solid-set irrigation system;

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of a CERTA-LOK™ or CERTA-SET™ pipe and coupler of the prior art;

FIGS. 4A and 4B are top schematic views of another prior art irrigation system arrangement for sequentially irrigating different parts of a field, where FIG. 4A has lateral lines at one position along the main line and FIG. 4B has the same lateral lines moved to another position along the main line;

FIGS. 5A and 5B are top and side views, respectively, of a first embodiment pipe manipulation device of the present invention;

FIGS. 6A-6D are top, sequential views of a first alternative of the pipe manipulation device of FIGS. 5A and 5B assembling irrigation pipe, where FIG. 6A shows a length of pipe partially assembled, FIG. 6B shows a pipe section and coupler being placed near an end of the pipe, FIG. 6C shows the pipe section being coupled to the end of the pipe, and FIG. 6D shows the pipe and newly coupled section being pulled into a field;

FIGS. 7A-7D are top, sequential views of a second alternative of the pipe manipulation device of FIGS. 5A and 5B disassembling irrigation pipe, where FIG. 7A shows the end of a length of pipe accepted by the device, FIG. 7B shows the end of pipe pulled into the device, FIG. 7C shows the pipe section and coupler removed from the pipe, and FIG. 7D shows the pipe with the pipe section and coupler stored;

FIGS. 8-12 are several view of a second embodiment pipe manipulation device, where FIG. 8 is a top view of a tractor connected to the device, FIG. 9 is a top view of a pipe drive mechanism and a pipe carrier, FIG. 10 is a perspective view of the pipe drive mechanism of FIG. 8, FIG. 11 is sectional view 11-11 of FIG. 8, and FIG. 12 is sectional view 12-12 of FIG. 8;

FIG. 13 is a schematic of a portion of the hydraulic system of the pipe manipulation device of FIGS. 8-12;

FIGS. 14A-14C, 15A-15E, 16A-16B, and 17 are sequential views of a first alternative pipe manipulation device of FIG. 8 disassembling pipe, where FIGS. 14A, 14B, and 14C are a top view, side view A-A of FIG. 9, and sectional side view B-B of FIG. 9, respectively, showing the device accepting the end of a pipe, FIGS. 15A, 15B, 15C, 15D, and 15E are

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a top view, side view A-A, and three sectional side views B-B, respectively, of FIG. 15A of the coupler handling mechanism restraining the coupler, FIGS. 16A and 16B are a top and sectional side view B-B showing a disassembled pipe segment separated from the pipe, and FIG. 17 is a side view A-A of the pipe segment being moved by the pipe carrier;

FIG. 18A is a perspective view of one embodiment pipe coupler handler in an open configuration;

FIGS. 18B and 18C are a perspective and side view, respectively, of one embodiment pipe coupler handling mechanism in a closed configuration;

FIGS. 19A, 19B and 19C are sequential top views the pipe drive mechanism for an alternative decoupling method;

FIGS. 20A, 20B, 20C, and 20D are sequential top views the pipe drive mechanism for a second alternative decoupling method;

FIG. 21 is a top view of a second alternative pipe manipulation device of FIG. 8;

FIGS. 22-25 are sequential views of the pipe manipulation device of FIG. 21 assembling pipe, where FIGS. 22A, 22B, and 22C are a top view, a side view C-C of FIG. 21, and a top detail views, respectively, of the device accepting a coupling, FIGS. 23A and 23B are a top view and a side views C-C, respectively, views of the device joining the coupling to one pipe segment, FIGS. 24A, 24B, 24C, and 24D are a top view and several side views C-C, respectively, views of the device joining the coupling to the other adjoining pipe segment, and FIGS. 25A and 25B are a top view and a side view C-C, respectively, views of the device releasing the pipe for deployment in the field;

FIG. 26 is a top view of an first alternative pipe drive mechanism having four drives;

FIG. 27 is a sectional view 12-12 of a second alternative drive mechanism with three sets of drive wheels; and

FIG. 28 is a sectional view 12-12 of a third alternative drive mechanism having one lower drive wheel and two upper idler wheels.

Reference symbols are used in the Figures to indicate certain components, aspects or features shown therein, with reference symbols common to more than one Figure indicating like components, aspects or features shown therein.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Although certain preferred embodiments and examples are disclosed below, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that the invention extends beyond the specifically disclosed embodiments to other alternative embodiments and/or uses of the invention and obvious modifications and equivalents thereof. Thus it is intended that the scope of the invention herein disclosed should not be limited by the particular disclosed embodiments described below. In any method disclosed herein, the acts or operations making up the method/process may be performed in any suitable sequence, and are not necessarily limited to any particular disclosed sequence. For purposes of contrasting various embodiments with the prior art, certain aspects and advantages of these embodiments are described where appropriate herein. Of course, it is to be understood that not necessarily all such aspects or advantages may be achieved in accordance with any particular embodiment. Thus, for example, it should be recognized that the various embodiments may be carried out in a manner that achieves or optimizes one advantage or group of advantages as taught herein without necessarily achieving other aspects or advantages as may be taught or suggested herein.

The present invention provides a method and system for the manipulation of piping in the field—that is, for assembling

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and/or disassembling and moving of pipe. The present invention can be used to manipulate piping for a variety of applications, including but not limited to, irrigation systems or for other portable systems such as emergency response, waste water spray fields, dust control, and pipelines for the chemical industry, construction, such as electrical conduits, public works, such as water and sewer lines, and pollution control. Particular embodiments of the present invention are described herein as a method and system for manipulating pipes for solid-set irrigation systems. These embodiments are presented for illustrative purposes only, and are not meant to limit the scope of the present invention.

FIGS. 5A and 5B are top and side views, respectively, of a first embodiment pipe manipulation device 500 of the present invention. Device 500 is shown as being on ground G and including a pipe drive mechanism 510 having a first mechanism 512 and a second mechanism 514 that can each impart forces on a pipe or pipe sections on either side of a region 513 between the first and second mechanisms, a pipe carrier 520, and a coupler carrier 530. Each mechanism 512 and 514 is capable of imparting longitudinal forces, including forces in the same direction and forces in opposite directions. In one embodiment of the present invention, region 513 contains a workstation for coupling and decoupling pipe, either manually or through other devices. Device 500 can be used to assemble or disassemble pipe, automating some or all of the coupling and decoupling actions required for a particular type of modular pipe.

Device 500 is shown, for illustrative purposes, in FIGS. 5A and 5B with pipe drive mechanism 510 engaging an end 12 of pipe 10 formed from a plurality of pipe segments 11 and pipe couplers 13 and having an end 14 distal from the device. Pipe 10 is manipulated by device 500 and does not form part of the present invention. Device 500 may accept pipe 10 of various diameters and can assemble or disassemble segments 11 having differing lengths and/or pipe couplers 13. Thus, for example, segments 11 may have, but are not limited to, length of 20 feet, 30 feet, or 40 feet. In addition, the present invention is not limited to pipes of any particular diameter. Pipe 10 may have, but is not limited to, a diameter ranging from approximately one inch to approximately one and a half feet. Thus, for example, pipe 10 may have a diameter ranging from 1½ to 4 inches, as is typical of lateral irrigation lines, or it may have a diameter ranging from 6 to 12 inches, as is typical of main irrigation lines.

Except as further detailed below, the present invention is adapted to work on pipes that include, but are not limited to, pipes that are joined by threading, or with lock rings or splines, glued, thermal welded, or flanged, and for couplers that are separate from the pipe segments, that are integrally incorporated into or affixed to the pipe segments. In addition, device 500 allows pipe having risers extending away from the pipe to be manipulated without damaging the pipe, connector, riser, or sprinkler head. Thus, for example, in one embodiment of the present invention, device 500 is adapted to assemble and/or disassemble pipe 10 that may be a prior art pipe 2 as shown in FIG. 3, where pipe segment 11 is a segment 1 and pipe coupler 13 is coupler 3 with or without an attached riser 5 or sprinkler head 7.

Device 500 can be used to manipulate pipe formed of discrete pipe sections and couplers that hold the pipe sections together. Thus, for example, as described subsequently, device 500 can be used to either assemble pipe from modular segments, for example by sequentially connecting two or more tube or pipe segments 11 into pipe 10, or to disassemble pipe 10 into component pipe segments 11 and couplers 13. Preferably, pipe segments are formed from a sturdy material

and can be joined at the pipe ends or with interposed couplers, and that can bend a significant amount, such as through 0 to 30 degrees, without breaking.

One example of pipe that can be used with the present invention is formed from segments and couplers of PVC. While the invention is described herein in connection with PVC pipe and couplers, such as the couplers of FIG. 3, those skilled in the art will appreciate that other materials can be used to practice the invention. For example, the invention may be practiced with aluminum or polyethylene tubing, and with stainless steel and/or polyethylene or nylon fittings.

One embodiment of a method of using device 500 is shown in FIGS. 5A and 5B as being positioned on a fixed location of the ground G for manipulating pipe for coupling, decoupling and transporting by the action of forces imposed by pipe drive mechanism 510. Device 500 is shown in FIGS. 5A and 5B with pipe carrier 520 having a plurality of pipe segments 11, and with coupler carrier 530 having a plurality of pipe couplers 13. Pipe carrier 520 includes mechanisms for transporting pipe segments 11 to and from pipe drive mechanism 510. Coupler carrier 530 includes mechanisms for transporting pipe couplers 13 to and from the pipe drive mechanism 510. Alternatively, coupler carrier 530 includes a bin for holding pipe couplers 13 which are manually put in place for assembly or removed for disassembly.

While device 500 is generally useful for either assembling or disassembling pipe, not all portions of device 500 may be required for a particular task, such as assembling pipe or disassembling pipe. Thus, various embodiments of device 500 include pipe drive mechanism 510 and some or all of the other portions of the device, such as a pipe carrier 520 and/or coupler carrier 530 as required to perform a particular task.

In general, pipe drive mechanism 510 includes mechanisms 512 and 514 to engage a portion of the pipe and cooperatively impart longitudinal forces to move and/or restrain pipe, pipe segments, or couplers. In several embodiments of the present invention, mechanisms 512 and/or 514 include frictional, or traction, members that are controllably driven to impart longitudinal forces on the portion of the pipe within the mechanism. Examples of mechanisms 512 and 514 include, but are not limited to, frictional members can be opposing rotating surface, such as pneumatic or rubber wheels and/or rotors such that grip a pipe or pipe section and impart a longitudinal force when rotated, longitudinally extending traction members, other members that grip or slidably engage the outer portion of a pipe or pipe sections, and or any combination thereof. It is preferred that mechanism 512 and/or 514 includes a drive mechanism that can impart sufficient force to transport a length of pipe at a speed of from 0 to 250 feet per minute or more. In one embodiment, mechanism 512 and/or 514 imparts a force over a length greater than the longitudinal extent of a coupler so that traction is not lost when a coupler passes through one of the mechanisms. Alternatively, both mechanisms 512 and 514 impart forces over lengths greater than the longitudinal extent of a coupler. In another embodiment of the present invention, one or both of mechanisms 512, 514 is adjustable between a first configuration for providing forces to an accepted pipe and a second configuration to allow a pipe to be removed from the mechanism.

Importantly, pipe drive mechanism 500 includes multiple mechanisms that are controlled to impart forces in the same or opposite direction to aid in the coupling and decoupling of the pipe. In one embodiment, first mechanism 512 is independently controllable and to act, when required, to restrain pipe or to force the pipe in a direction opposite to that imparted by second mechanism 514. Mechanisms 512 and 514 may thus

both engage the same pipe segment of pipe 10, preferably forcing the pipe in one direction or another, or they may both engage different and adjacent pipe sections for coupling and decoupling pipe segments. The forces for coupling and decoupling can impart forces longitudinally on adjacent pipe sections towards one another, such as to force two pipe ends together, as in an assembly procedure, for example, or impart forces longitudinally on adjacent pipe sections away from one another, such as to force two pipe ends away from each other, as in a disassembly procedure, for example.

Alternative embodiments of device 500 include, but is not limited to, devices for the manipulation of pipe where the coupler is integral with or is previously attached to one end of each pipe segment, the manipulation of pipes having risers and/or sprinkler heads attached to couplers, and devices that automate the connection process, for example by rotating threaded connectors or supplying splines or clamps to appropriate connectors. Alternative embodiments of pipe drive mechanisms 510 include, but are not limited to, mechanisms that are reversible to allow the assembly and disassembly from either end, and mechanisms that includes three or more devices that are each capable of imparting longitudinal forces in the same or opposing directions.

FIGS. 6A-6D depict another embodiment of device 500 as a first alternative pipe manipulation device 600, which may be generally similar to the embodiment illustrated in FIGS. 5A and 5B, except as further detailed below. Where possible, similar elements are identified with identical reference numerals in the depiction of the embodiments of FIGS. 5A and 5B. Device 600 thus includes, for example, pipe drive mechanism 510, pipe carrier 620, and coupler carrier 630. The sequence of FIGS. 6A through 6D illustrate one embodiment of a method of assembly pipe using device 600 to form pipe 10 from a plurality of pipe sections 11. More specifically, FIG. 6A shows a length of pipe partially assembled, FIG. 6B shows a pipe section and coupler being placed near an end of the pipe, FIG. 6C shows the pipe section being coupled to the end of the pipe, and FIG. 6D shows the pipe and newly coupled section being pulled into a field. In addition to the method illustrated in FIGS. 6A-6D, device 600 may also be operated to disassemble of pipe.

With reference to FIGS. 6A-6D, a method of assembling pipe is illustrated. Device 600 is positioned on the ground and, through the manipulation of segments 11 and couplers 13, produces pipe 10 of increasing length, with end 14 moving away from the device. The addition of length to pipe 10 is shown in FIGS. 6B through 6D. As shown in FIG. 6B, end 12 is within first mechanism 512 with coupler 13 within region 513. A single segment 11' is removed by a mechanism, not shown in FIG. 6, from pipe carrier 620 and aligned near end 12 and within second mechanism 514, and a pipe coupler 13' is removed from pipe coupler carrier 630 and placed between end 12 and segment 11'. Pipe coupler 13' is placed between end 12 and segment 11' manually. Alternatively, coupler 13' is placed between end 12 and segment 11' by a device 600.

Next, as shown in FIG. 6C, pipe segment 11' and coupler 13' are brought together within region 513 and coupled to pipe 10, resulting in a pipe 10' having an increased length and an end 12'. Preferably, pipe drive mechanism 510 imparts different longitudinal forces to pipe segment 11' and end 12 to facilitate their joining to form pipe 10'. In one embodiment of the present invention, pipe segment 11' is held in place by being gripped by second mechanism, while end 12, coupler 13', and segment 11' are brought together by a longitudinal force of first mechanism 512 on end 12 in a direction towards the pipe segment. In another embodiment of the present

invention, end 12 and pipe segment 11' are forced in opposite directions and towards coupler 13' and each other.

Additionally, dependent on the particular coupling mechanism employed by pipe 10, other actions may be required for joining, either concurrent with or after the forcing of pipe segment 11' into end 12, including, but not limited to, the cleaning or lubricating of one or more meeting surfaces, a rotation about the longitudinal axis of the pipe, or the actuating or placement of retaining pieces at the joint. As one example of additional actions the pipe system shown in FIG. 3, end 12 and the end of pipe segment 11' inserted into coupler 13' are preferably cleaned and/or lubricated prior to coupling, and splines, such as splines 8a and 8b are inserted into coupler 13' to join pipe 10 to pipe segment 11'.

After pipe 10' is formed by joining pipe segment 11' to pipe 10, as shown in FIG. 6D, pipe 10' is transported from device 600 by first mechanism 512. In one embodiment of the present invention, end 14 is supported and pulled by a vehicle 640, such as a tractor or an all terrain vehicle, with or without the assistance of a force from first mechanism 512, as pipe 10' is transported into the field. In an alternative embodiment, end 14 is a free end that is pushed by pipe drive mechanism 512. Alternately, the force for transporting pipe 10' is assisted by second mechanism 514. Additional length of pipe is then added by repeating the steps illustrated in FIGS. 6B-6D.

FIGS. 7A-7D shows sequential view of a second alternative embodiment of device 500 as a second alternative pipe manipulation device 700 for disassembling irrigation pipe, including a pipe carrier 720 and a coupler carrier 730. Device 700 is useful for assembly or disassembly of pipe, or is configured for only for disassembly of pipe. Device 700, including pipe drive mechanism 510, pipe carrier 720 and coupler carrier 730, may be generally similar the device of FIGS. 5-6, and are, for example, generally similar to devices 500 and 600 disclosed herein, except as further discussed below.

Device 700 is used to disassemble a length of pipe 10 by removing one or more pipe segments 11. For illustrative purposes, the pipe section at end 12 is denoted as pipe section 11', which is joined by pipe coupler 13' to a pipe section 11". Specifically, FIG. 7A shows the end of a length of pipe 10 accepted by the device, FIG. 7B shows the end 12 of the pipe pulled into the device, FIG. 7C shows pipe section 11' and coupler 13' removed from the pipe, and FIG. 7D shows the pipe with the pipe section and coupler stored.

As shown in FIG. 7A, pipe 10 is positioned with end 12 within first mechanism 512 and end 14 distal from device 700. The reduction in the length of pipe 10 by the length of pipe segment 11' is shown in FIGS. 7B through 7D. As shown in FIG. 7B, pipe 10 is pulled into pipe drive mechanism 510 by the length of a pipe segment 11', positioning pipe coupler 13' within region 513. The force to move the pipe is supplied either with first mechanism 512 or alternatively with the assistance of second mechanism 514.

In one embodiment of the present invention, pipe 10 include risers, such as risers 5 or 125 that pass through first mechanism 512 without being damaged, preferably by orienting the riser to pass between traction elements of the first mechanism. With pipe 10 so situated, actions are taken to decouple the pipe and coupler. These actions may include, but are not limited to, depending on the pipe joining system used, a rotation about the longitudinal axis of the pipe or the actuating or placement of retaining pieces at the joint. For the pipe system of FIG. 13, decoupling includes the removal of a spline, such as one or both of splines 8a and 8b. To completely remove coupler 13', both splines are removed. To leave cou-

pler 13' on pipe segment 11 or 11', the spline for joining the coupler to the other segment is removed.

Next, as shown in FIG. 7C, pipe segments 11' and 11", and coupler 13' are taken apart. Specifically, pipe drive mechanism 510 imparts different longitudinal forces to pipe segments 11' and 11" to facilitate their disengagement and the shortening of pipe 10 to form pipe 10'. In one embodiment of the present invention, coupler 13 is removed from only one of the adjoining pipe segments 11 by second drive 514. In another embodiment of the present invention, pipe drive mechanism 510 includes a coupler handling mechanism that removably surrounds coupler 13' to hold it in place while segments 11' and 11" are pulled apart by the opposing forces of first and second mechanisms 512 and 514.

As shown in FIG. 7D, after segments 11' and coupler 13' are removed, segment 11' is placed in pipe carrier 720 and coupler 13' is placed or falls into in coupler carrier 730. Additional length of pipe is then removed by repeating the steps illustrated in FIGS. 7B-7D.

The methods illustrated in FIGS. 6 and 7 are illustrate and are not meant to limit the scope of the present invention. Thus for example, alternative embodiments include, but are not limited to, devices 500, 600 or 700 in which pipe segments or couplers are provided to drive mechanism 510 either manually or using feed mechanisms that are either manually operated or controlled by an automatic control system, and by devices that include additional mechanisms for performing other joining actions as required by specific piping systems. In another embodiment, the devices assemble or disassemble pipe segments having couplers attached. Thus for example, disassembly may leave a coupler on the end of each pipe. In yet another embodiment of the present invention, the couplers have risers and sprinkler heads attached.

FIGS. 8-12 are several view of a second embodiment pipe manipulation device 800 including a pipe drive mechanism 810, a pipe carrier 820 and a coupler carrier 830, where FIG. 8 is a top view of the pipe drive mechanism including a coupler handling mechanism 860 and the pipe carrier, FIG. 9 is a side view 9-9 of FIG. 8, FIG. 10 is a perspective view of the pipe drive mechanism of FIG. 8, FIG. 11 is sectional view 11-11 of FIG. 8, and FIG. 12 is sectional view 12-12 of FIG. 8. Device 800 may be generally similar the device of FIGS. 5-7, and are, for example, generally similar to devices 500, 600 and 700 disclosed herein, except as further discussed below.

As shown in FIG. 8, device 800 is show in the vicinity of a tractor 870. Tractor 870 provides power, including but not limited to a supply of pressurized hydraulic fluid through hoses (not shown) for operating device 800. Alternatively, device 800 is a stand-alone system that includes a power source to operate the device.

FIG. 9 shows device 800 without tractor 870 to facilitate the discussion of device 800. Pipe drive mechanism 810 has a frame 801 adapted for resting on the ground, a three-point hitch 803 for movement by a tractor or other vehicle, support for three drives 802 indicated as a first drive 802a, a second drive 802b, and a third drive 802c, operating control levers 804, an operator's seat 806, and a coupler handling mechanism 860 within region 513. Each drive 802 includes a set of three wheels, indicated as wheels 830, 840, and 850 that may be driven or idle, as described subsequently. Frame 801 supports protrusions 805 that act to guide pipe into device 800 that may have a riser protruding transversely from pipe 10. Thus, for example, it is preferred that any riser be directed between wheels, such as between wheels 830 and 840, to minimize damage to the riser.

Pipe carrier **820** includes a pipe segment bin **877** having wheels **873** and a trailer hitch **875** for easy transport, and mechanisms for moving pipe segments between bin **877** and second mechanism **514**. As shown in FIG. 8, a pipe tray **879** positioned longitudinally near second mechanism **514** to accept decoupled pipe and is mounted to bin **877** through hinges **878** that permit the pipe tray to rotate to place accepted pipe segments in bin **877**.

Coupler handling mechanism **860** includes a coupler support **861** to support the weight of the pipe, and a coupler restraining arm **863** that is lowered over a coupler to prevent longitudinal motion of a coupler. Coupler carrier **830** is a bin positioned below coupler handling mechanism **860** to permit an operator to pick up a coupler and place it in the coupler handling and to allow decoupled couplers to drop into the bin.

In alternative embodiments, coupler handling mechanism **860** and coupler carrier **830** are not provided. Thus, for example, if there is no separate coupling member, that is, the pipe segments are coupled directly together, or if a separate coupler is left attached to a pipe segment, there may be no need to restrain the joint during decoupling or coupling.

FIGS. 9-13 illustrate drives **802**. With reference to FIGS. 9 and 10, drives **802a**, **802b** and **802c** are hydraulically-driven wheel drives that are longitudinally displaced along an accepted pipe **10** and controlled to impart longitudinal forces on a pipe **10** within the drives and provide the function of first mechanism **512** and second mechanism **514**. Operating control levers **804** control hydraulic fluid or operating drives **802a**, **802b**, and **802c**. Specifically, drives **802a** and **802b** are operated in unison as a first mechanism **512** to impart a longitudinal force in a first direction indicated as arrow D1 (in a direction from drive **802a** to drive **802b**) or in a second direction indicated as arrow D2 (in a direction from drive **802a** to drive **802b**), as shown in FIG. 8. Drive **802c** is operated independently from drives **802a** and **802b** as second mechanism **514** to also impart a longitudinal force in either one of directions D1 or D2, or alternately to lock a pipe within drive **802c**.

FIGS. 11 and 12 are side and sectional views, respectively, of drive **802a**, where the components are indicated generally for each drive **802** without a corresponding letter "a," "b," or "c" on each reference numeral. Each element illustrated in FIGS. 11 and 12, with the exception of from **801**, is present in three locations in pipe drive mechanism **810**. Thus, for example, there are three sets of drive wheels **830** and **840** indicated in FIGS. 8-10: **830a** and **840a** for drive **802a**, **830b** and **840b** for **802b**, and **830a** and **840b** for drive **802c**.

Each drive **802** includes a first wheel **830** and a second wheel **840**. The position of wheels **830** and **840** are adjustable from a closed configuration to accept a pipe and provide traction to an open configuration where the wheels are moved apart. The side view of FIG. 11 shows a pipe **10** between wheels **830** and **840**, and the sectional side view of FIG. 12 show drive **802** is a closed configuration with the wheels overlapping in the position that they would be without a pipe or the opposing wheel. In the closed configuration of FIGS. 11 and 12, the axis of wheels **830** and **840** are inclined relative to each other such that the axes meet at an angle Ω in the closed configuration. The angled wheel assembly, though not required, aids in the driving of pipe that may move laterally during motion. The angle Ω may, for example, be near zero, for parallel axis, or may up to 60 degrees. Each drive **802** also includes an idler wheel **850** supported on frame **801** that supports pipe **10** against pipe's weight and the transverse force from the inclined first and second wheel. As described subsequently, drive **802** includes mechanisms to adjust the wheels to accommodate a range of pipe diameters and a

hydraulic piston to increase the force of wheels **830** and **840** on an accepted pipe **10** and to move the drive to an open configuration where the wheels are separated to allow, for example, a pipe to be removed transversely.

Drive **802** includes a pair of mirror image motors and linkages connected to frame **801** for adjusting the size of pipe that is driven, the force on the accepted pipe, and that also allows for disengagement of the drive. Specifically, first hydraulic motor **832** is mounted on a support **831** and adapted for driving first wheel **830**. Support **831** is connected to frame **801** through a four-bar, adjustable linkage including a link **833** that is rotationally connected to support **831** at pivot **1231**, a link **836** that is rotationally connected to support **831** at pivot **1237**, and a plate **835** that is fixed to frame **801** and that is rotationally connected to link **833** at pivot **1233** and to link **836** at pivot **1235**. An end **834** of link **833** includes a pin (not show) that engages one of holes **838** to adjustably connect link **833** to plate **835**. In addition, second hydraulic motor **842** is each mounted on a support **841** and adapted for driving first wheel **840**. Support **841** is connected to frame **801** through a four-bar, adjustable linkage including a link **843** that is rotationally connected to support **841** at pivot **1241**, a link **846** that is rotationally connected to support **841** at pivot **1247**, and a plate **845** that is fixed to frame **801** and that is rotationally connected to link **843** at pivot **1243** and to link **846** at pivot **1245**. An end **844** of link **843** includes a pin (not show) that engages one of holes **848** to adjustably connect link **843** to plate **845**. A hydraulic piston **851** is rotationally connected to link **836** at pivot **1239** and to link **846** at pivot **1249**.

The angle Ω of the closed configuration of drive **802** is adjusted by the position of the pins in links **833** and **843** in holes **838** and **848**, respectively, to allow for accommodating various pipe diameters. Thus, for example, engaging holes **838** and **848** that are further apart increases angle Ω and accommodates a smaller pipe, and engaging holes **838** and **848** that are closer together decreases angle Ω and accommodates a larger pipe. Increasing or extending the length of hydraulic cylinder **851** moves pivots **1239** and **1249** apart and thus increases the force on an accepted pipe. Decreasing, or contracting, the length of hydraulic cylinder **851** moves pivots **1239** and **1249** together, moving wheels **830** and **840** apart, and opening drive **802**.

In one embodiment of the present invention, drive **802** accommodates pipes having a diameter of from approximately 1 inch to approximately 18 inches. In another embodiment, drive **802** accommodates pipes having a diameter of from approximately 3 inches to approximately 12 inches. In another embodiment, the transverse (compressive) force on an accepted pipe **10** is from about 1 to about 500 pounds. Wheels **830** and **840** are preferably solid rubber, semi-pneumatic, or pneumatic tires having a diameter of from 12 to 36 inches. In another embodiment, wheels **830** and **840** have a diameter of from 18 to 24 inches. Hydraulic motors **832** and **842** are preferably high-torque, low-speed motors, and can the type supplied by the Hydraulic Pump/Motor Division of Parker (Greeneville, Tenn.).

Alternatively, one or more drive **802** may include springs or other tensioning devices, may include other traction devices, including locking mechanisms, and not include variable spacing to accommodate a variety of pipe sizes. Additionally, drive **802** may include additional mechanisms for assembly or disassembly of piping, including, but not limited to, turning, threading, welding or gluing to form a continuous pipe.

Several additional embodiments of the pipe drive mechanism are shown in FIGS. 26-28. FIG. 26 is a top view of an

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first alternative pipe drive mechanism **2610** having four drives **2602**, specifically drives **2602a**, **2602b**, **2602c** and **2602d**. Pipe drive mechanism **2610** may be generally similar the device of FIGS. **8-12**, and is, for example, generally similar to drive **810** disclosed herein, except as further discussed below.

Drives **2602a**, **2602b**, **2602c** and **2602d** include hydraulically-driven wheel drives that are longitudinally displaced along an accepted pipe **10** and controlled to impart longitudinal forces on a pipe **10** within the drives. Device **2610** differs from device **810** in that each mechanism **512**, **514** has two drives. The control of drives **2602** provides coordinated control between pairs of drives, such that drives **2602a** and **2602b** form first mechanism **512** and drives **2602c** and **2602d** form second mechanism **514**. More specifically, operating control levers **804** control hydraulic fluid or operating drives **2602a**, **2602b**, **2602c** and **2602d**. Drives **2602a** and **2602b** are operated in unison as a first mechanism **512** to impart a longitudinal force in a first direction, from drive **2602a** to drive **2602d**, or in a second direction from drive **2602a** to drive **2602d**. Drives **2602c** and **2602d** are operated in unison and independently from drives **2602a** and **2602b** as second mechanism **514** to also impart a longitudinal force in either one of the longitudinal directions, or alternately to lock a pipe.

Since pipe drive mechanism **2610** is symmetric, with two drives on either side of region **513**, the mechanism is reversible, allowing for pushing or pulling of pipe on either end of the mechanisms, for any of the methods described herein. Mechanism **2610** thus allows for assembling and disassembling on either side. This is particularly useful for solid-set layouts as illustrated in FIG. **1**, where lateral lines **120** emanate from both sides of main line **110**. For such layouts, mechanism **2610** need not be turned around to assemble or disassemble on opposites of the main line.

FIG. **27** is a sectional view **12-12** of a drive mechanism **2702** which may be generally similar the device of FIGS. **8-12**, and is, for example, generally similar to drive **802** disclosed herein, except as further discussed below. Specifically, drive mechanism **2702** has three drive wheels and includes a motor **852** that drives wheel **850**. Specifically, wheels **830**, **840**, and **850** are driven by motors **832**, **842**, and **852**, respectively.

FIG. **28** is a sectional view **12-12** of a drive mechanism **2802** which may be generally similar the device of FIGS. **8-12**, and is, for example, generally similar to drive **802** disclosed herein, except as further discussed below. Specifically, drive mechanism **2802** has one drive wheel and two idling wheels. Wheels **830** and **840** are mounted to freely rotate on mounting **2830** and **2840**, respectively. Wheel **850** is mounted on motor **852** that drives that wheel.

While pipe drive mechanisms **810** and **2610** have been described as having similar drives **802**, it is within the scope to vary the drives. Thus for example, any combination of drives, including but not limited to combinations of drives **802**, **2702** or **2802** may be provided to provide a longitudinal force power any of the mechanisms. Thus for example, with reference to FIG. **9**, one embodiment of the present invention may have drive a drive **802** at the position of drive **802a**, have a drive **2702** in place of drive **802b**, and may have a drive **2802** in place of drive **802c**. In addition, other mechanisms for varying the tension of the drive on an accepted pipe, of adjusting the drive to accept different diameter pipes, and for opening and closing the drives are within the scope of the present invention.

FIG. **18A** is a perspective view of one embodiment pipe coupler handler **860** in a first configuration, and FIG. **18B** and **18C** are a perspective and side view, respectively, of mechanism **860** in a second configuration. FIGS. **18A-18C** also

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show a coupler **13** that is part of a pipe **10**, which is not shown in FIG. **18**. That is, the position of coupler **13** in FIGS. **18A-18C** is that position that a coupler occupies as a pipe travels through device **800**, and is the position at which handler **860** is adapted for working on an accepted coupler **13**.

Pipe coupler handling mechanism **860** includes coupler support **861** having a hydraulic cylinder **1801** on a link **1802** that connects frame **801** to a platform **1803**, and coupler restraining arm **863** includes a hydraulic cylinder **1805** and a link **1806** that connects the frame to a clamp **1807** that includes a pair of prongs **1807a** and **1807b** fixed to link **1806**. Coupler restraining arm **863** also includes a tool **1809** having grippers **1808** for pulling one or more splines adapted for joining coupler **13** to adjacent and inserted pipe segments, including but not limited to spline **8**.

Hydraulic cylinder **1801** is movable, under the action of hydraulic fluid from a first configuration indicated as cylinder **1801'** in FIG. **18A** to a longer configuration indicated as cylinder **1801''** in FIGS. **18B** and **18C**. The increase in length from cylinder **1801'** to cylinder **1801''** moves coupler support **861** from a first position, indicated as support **861'** to a second position, indicated as support **861''**. Hydraulic cylinder **1805** is movable, under the action of hydraulic fluid from a first configuration indicated as cylinder **1805'** in FIG. **18A** to a longer configuration indicated as cylinder **1805''** in FIGS. **18B** and **18C**. The increase in length from cylinder **1805'** to cylinder **1805''** moves arm **863** from a first position, indicated as arm **863'** to a second position, indicated as arm **863''**. Cylinders **1801** and **1805** are independently controllable, either through manual valves or through a control system. Additionally, a spline insertion tool may be incorporated into mechanism **860**.

The spacing of prongs **1807a**, **1807b** is such that clamp **1807** fits, for example, about a riser that is midway between the ends of the clamp. Arm **863''** also aligns tool **1809** so that grippers **1808** can pull one or more splines. In an alternative embodiment, gripper **1808** grabs and releases either one spline or is controllable to remove either spline, one at a time.

FIG. **13** is a schematic of a portion of the hydraulic system **1300** of the pipe manipulation device of FIGS. **8-12**. Actuation of system **1300** results in wheels **830** and **840** providing the operation of first mechanism **512** and second mechanism **514**. System **1300** includes a first coupler **1310** allowing the system to receive pressurized hydraulic fluid from source, such as a nearby tractor, and a second coupler **1320** allowing for the discharge of hydraulic fluid. Hydraulic fluid is directed by valves **804**, including a first and second 4-way, 3-position, spring center directional control valves **1302-1** and **1301-2**, respectively and a first and second 4-way, 3-position, directional control valves **1302-1** and **1302-2**. The valved fluid is directed through pressure reducing relief valves **1304-1** and **1304-2** to the cylinders to apply the correct force on the wheels, and flow control valves **1306-1** and **1306-2** which control the speed of hydraulic drive motors **832a**, **842a**, **832b**, **842b**, **832c**, and **842c** and actuate hydraulic cylinders **851a**, **851b**, and **851c**.

Valve **1301-1** controllably directs the flow of hydraulic fluid from A to B, as indicated on the valve, to rotate motors **832a**, **842a**, **832b**, and **842b** in one direction, from B to A to rotate motors **832a**, **842a**, **832b**, and **842b** in an opposite direction, or to lock motors **832a**, **842a**, **832b**, and **842b**. Valve **1302-1** controllably directs the flow of hydraulic fluid from A to B to open or close hydraulic cylinders **851a** and **851b**, and valve **1304-1** provides a setting for a maximum closing force on the hydraulic cylinders **851a** and **851b**. Valve **1301-2** controllably directs the flow from A to B, as indicated on the valve, to rotate motors **832c** and **842c** in one direction,

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from B to A to rotate motors **832c**, and **842c** in an opposite direction, or to lock motors **832c** and **842c**. Valve **1302-2** controllably directs the flow of hydraulic fluid from A to B to open or close hydraulic cylinders **851c**, and valve **1304-2** provides a setting for a maximum closing force on the hydraulic cylinders **851c** and **851b**. Valves **1301-1**, **1302-1**, and **1304-1** thus control wheels **830a**, **840a**, **830b**, and **830b** to provide the action of first mechanism **512**, and valves **1301-2**, **1302-2**, and **1304-2** control wheels **830c** and **840c**, **830b**, and **830b** to provide the action of first mechanism **514**.

Alternative embodiments of system **1300** are adaptable to other pipe drive mechanisms or drives, for example by providing hydraulics to control a different number of wheels, as in drives **2702** or **2802**. Alternatively, additional hydraulics is required for additional drives. Thus for example, pipe drive mechanism **2600** requires four drives, and thus an additional set of hydraulic for drives **802d** that mirrors the hydraulics of drives **802a** and **802b**. In addition, mechanism **2600** is symmetric and thus reversible. In one embodiment of the present invention, the alternative embodiment of system **1300** for mechanism **2600** includes a lever to direct the assembly and disassembly actions from one side of the mechanism or the other.

Many embodiments of mechanisms **512** and **514** are within the scope of the present invention in addition to those discussed above. Thus, for example, each mechanism may include individual drives having two wheels or four or more wheels. The wheels can be driven in different combinations. Thus, for example, wheels **850** can be driven with one or both of wheels **830** and **840** idling or all of the wheels can be driven. Mechanisms **512** and **514** can each include one, two, or more sets of longitudinally spaced wheels.

FIGS. **14A-14C**, **15A-15E**, **16A-16B**, and **17** as sequential views of a first alternative embodiment of **800** as pipe manipulation device **1400** disassembling pipe, where FIGS. **14A**, **14B**, and **14C** are a top, side, and sectional side view **14C-14C** of FIG. **14A** of the device accepting the end of a pipe, FIGS. **15A**, **15B**, **15C**, **15D**, and **15E** are a top, side, and sectional side views **14C-14C**, **14D-14D**, and **14E-14E**, respectively, of FIG. **15A** of the coupler handling mechanism restraining the coupler, FIGS. **16A** and **16B** are a top and sectional side view **16B-16B** of FIG. **16A** of a disassembled pipe segment separated from the pipe, and FIG. **17** is a side view of the pipe segment being moved by the pipe carrier, Device **1400**, including pipe drive mechanism **810**, pipe carrier **820** and coupler carrier or bin **1430**, is useful for assembly or disassembly of pipe, or is configured for only for disassembly of pipe. Device **1400** may be generally similar to the device of FIGS. **5**, **7** and **8**, and are, for example, generally similar to devices **500**, **700**, and **800** disclosed herein, except as further discussed below.

Device **1400** is used to disassemble a length of pipe **10** by removing one or more pipe segments **11**. Drives **802a** and **802b** are shown in a closed configuration, that is with cylinder **851a** and **851b** extended, and drive **802c** is shown in an open configuration, with cylinder **851c** contracted. For illustrative purposes, the pipe section at end **12** is denoted as pipe section **11'**, which is joined by pipe coupler **13'** to a pipe section **11''**. FIGS. **14A-14C** shows pipe **10** accepted by pipe drive mechanism **810** with first mechanism **512** engaging the pipe and translating it towards second mechanism **514**, with second mechanism disengaged, and with end **12** protruding to pipe tray **879**. In addition, the coupler handling mechanism is an open configuration of support **861'** and arm **863'**. FIG. **14B** shows pipe **10** being accepted with an attached riser **15** entering between protrusions **805**. FIG. **14C** shows coupler support **861'** and coupler restraining arm **863'** positioned to allow

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pipe to travel unimpeded through coupler handling mechanism **860** and a chute **1409** that extends from the position of platform **1803** as shown in FIG. **14C** to coupler bin or carrier **1430**.

FIGS. **15A-15E** shows pipe **10** with mechanism **512**, **514** locked to prevent lateral movement of the pipe. The hydraulics of coupler handling mechanism **860** has been actuated such that coupler **13** is positioned at coupler handling mechanism **860**. FIG. **15B** shows riser **15** protruding vertically. Cylinders **1801** and **1805** are then actuated to clamp coupler **13**, as shown in FIG. **15C** as coupler support **861''** and coupler restraining arm **863''**. As shown in FIG. **15D**, gripper **1808** is next placed against and engages the ends of the splines of coupler **13**. Next, as shown in FIG. **15E**, coupler restraining arm **863** is moved to the position of arm **863'**, thereby pulling splines **1501** from coupler **13** and decoupling pipe segment **11** from the coupler.

Next, as shown in FIGS. **16A-16B**, second mechanism **514** is activated to eject segment **11** into pipe tray **879**. In addition, with coupler **13** disengaged from pipe **10** and pipe segment **11**, it can now be separated from these components. Specifically, coupler support **863** is lowered into the position of support **861'**, allowing coupler **13** to slide off of platform **1803**, down chute **1409** and into bin **1430**. Next, as shown in FIG. **17**, pipe segment **11** is lifted with pipe tray **879** into bin **877**.

An alternative method of decoupling pipe is illustrated in FIGS. **19** and **20**. FIGS. **19A-19C** are sequential top views the pipe drive mechanism for an alternative decoupling method that keeps the coupler attached to a pipe segment. In FIG. **19A**, a pipe **10** having, sequentially, an end pipe segment **11**, a coupler **13**, and a pipe segment **11'** is accepted in to pipe drive mechanism **810** with coupler **13** between first mechanism **512** and second mechanism **514**. Next, as shown in FIG. **19B**, the spline coupling coupler **13** to pipe segment **11** is then removed, and, with first mechanism **512** restraining pipe segment **11'**, second mechanism **514** forces pipe segment **11** from pipe drive mechanism **810**, as indicated by the arrow. Then, as shown in FIG. **19C**, one or both of mechanisms **512** and **514** are then used to force the remaining pipe **10'** through mechanism **810**.

FIGS. **20A-20D** are sequential top views the pipe drive mechanism for a second alternative decoupling method to separate a coupler from adjoining pipe segments without a coupler handling mechanism, such as without mechanism **860**. First, as shown in FIG. **20A**, a pipe **10** having, sequentially, an end pipe segment **11**, a coupler **13**, and a pipe segment **11'** is accepted in to pipe drive mechanism **810** with coupler **13** between first mechanism **512** and second mechanism **514**. Next, as shown in FIG. **20B**, the spline coupling coupler **13** to pipe segment **11** is then removed, and, with first mechanism **512** restraining pipe segment **11'**, second mechanism **514** forces pipe segment **11** from pipe drive mechanism **810**, as indicated by the arrow. The other spline is then removed from coupler **13**, and then, as shown in FIG. **20C**, the pipe is advanced such that the coupler is engaged in second mechanism **514**. The next step is to restrain pipe segment **11'** with first mechanism **512** and force coupler from pipe segment **11'** by activating second mechanism **514**, as shown by the arrow.

FIG. **21** is a top view of a second alternative embodiment of device **800** as a pipe manipulation device **2100**. Device **2100**, including pipe drive mechanism **810** and pipe carrier **820** is useful for assembly or disassembly of pipe, or is configured for only for assembly of pipe. Device **2100** may be generally similar to the device of FIGS. **5**, **6**, **8**, and **14** and are, for

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example, generally similar to devices **500**, **600**, **800**, and **1400** disclosed herein, except as further discussed below.

As shown in FIG. **21**, device **2100** includes a pipe drive mechanism **810**, a pipe carrier **820** and a coupler carrier **830**. A tractor **870** is shown attached to pipe drive mechanism **810**. Importantly, tractor **870** provides power, including but not limited to a supply of pressurized hydraulic fluid through hoses (not shown) for operating device **800**. Alternatively, device **2100** is a stand-alone system that includes a power source to operate the device. Pipe **10** is assembled from a fixed location in the field with an end **14** that is provided to the surrounding area. As shown in FIG. **21**, a vehicle **640** is attached to end **14** and pulls pipe away from device **2100**.

Several methods of using device **2100** are shown in FIGS. **22-25** as sequential top and sectional views, respectively, of an alternative pipe manipulation device **2100** assembling pipe. In FIGS. **22-25** the tractor **870** and vehicle **640** are shown to more clearly illustrate the invention. FIGS. **22A**, **22B**, and **22C** are a top view, a side view C-C of FIG. **21**, and a top detail views, respectively, of the device accepting a coupling, FIGS. **23A** and **23B** are a top view and a side views C-C, respectively, views of the device joining the coupling to one pipe segment, FIGS. **24A**, **24B**, **24C**, and **24D** are a top view and several side views C-C, respectively, views of the device joining the coupling to the other adjoining pipe segment, and FIGS. **25A** and **25B** are a top view and a side view C-C, respectively, views of the device releasing the pipe for deployment in the field. Device **2100** is useful for assembly or disassembly of pipe, or is configured for only for assembly of pipe. Device **1400** may be generally similar the device of FIGS. **5**, **6**, **8** and **14**, and are, for example, generally similar to devices **500**, **600**, **800** and **1400** disclosed herein, except as further discussed below.

Several of the steps of using device **2100**, including a spline insertion device **2110** are as follows. First, as in FIGS. **22A**, **22B**, and **22C** first mechanism **512** restrains pipe **10** from moving laterally and a coupler **13** is placed on platform **1803**. In one embodiment, coupler **13** is manually placed on platform **1803**. As shown in FIG. **22C**, a cleaning and lubricating unit **2201** is positioned near the position occupied by coupler **13** to spray a cleaning and lubricating solution on pipes to be inserted into the coupler. Unit **2201** includes a wire brush for cleaning the pipe or pipe segment and, then sprays a solutions including, but are not limited to, a light soap and water solution or a lubricant.

In an alternative embodiment, an automatic control device places coupler **13** at the proper time for assembling pipe. Pipe **10** is then lubricated from spray from lubricating unit **2201**. Next, as shown in FIGS. **23A** and **23B**, arm **863** is moved onto coupler **13** to prevent the coupler from moving, lubricating unit **2201** lubricates pipe **10**, and first mechanism **512** forces pipe **10** into coupler **13**, and spline insertion device **2110** forces a spline into the coupler to join pipe **10** and coupler **13**.

Next, as shown in FIGS. **24A-24C**, pipe segment **11** is provided from pipe carrier **820** into second mechanism **514**. Pipe segment **11** may be placed manually in second mechanism **514**, or may be conveyed from pipe carrier **820**. Although not shown in the figures, many conveyer devices are known and are adaptable for moving pipe sections. One such conveyer is a roller chain conveyer with attached dog. Such conveyers ("log chains") are used in the timber industry. A conveyer of the present invention includes, but is not limited to, a roller chain conveyer with attached dogs that protrude from chain to grab individual pipes from a bundle storage or to return the pipes to storage after removing from the field.

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Spline insertion device **2110** then forces spline material **2401** towards the coupler (FIG. **24C**), and cuts the spline to the correct size and inserts spline **2403** into the coupler to join pipe segment **11** and coupler **13**. As shown in FIGS. **25A** and **25B**, arm **863** is then retracted, and the longer pipe **10'** is ready to be transported the length of the pipe segment into the field, and the steps of FIGS. **22-25** are repeated until the desired length of pipe is assembled.

EXAMPLES

Several examples of the use of the pipe drive mechanism of the present invention, as shown for example in FIG. **8**, are now presented. These examples are meant to provide illustrative demonstrations of the capabilities of devices of the present invention, and are not meant to limit the scope of the invention.

In the following examples, hydraulic drive wheel motors are driven with a total load force on the drive wheels of about 1500 psi. For transporting pipe through the drive mechanism, a pressure of approximately 1000 pounds per square inch was used. For transporting a pipe and coupling through the drive mechanism, a pressure of approximately 1500 pounds per square inch was used.

Example 1

Transport of 3 Inch Diameter YELOMINE™ Pipe

A pipe drive mechanism was used to install (push) a 600 foot length of 3 inch YELOMINE™ pipe at a rate of approximately 60 feet per minute into a field. The same mechanism was also used to retrieve (pull) 1440 feet of the 3 inch pipe from an existing field.

Example 2

Transport of 10 Inch Diameter YELOMINE™ Pipe

A pipe drive mechanism was used to install a 640 foot length of 10 inch YELOMINE™ pipe at a rate of 28 feet per minute into a field. The same mechanism was also used to retrieve the same 640 foot length of 10 inch pipe at a rate of 45 feet per minute.

Example 3

Transport of 12 Inch Pipe

A pipe drive mechanism was used to install approximately 400 feet of 12 inch diameter PVC pipe into a field.

The invention has now been explained with regard to specific embodiments. Variations on these embodiments and other embodiments may be apparent to those of skill in the art. It is therefore intended that the invention not be limited by the discussion of specific embodiments. It is understood that the examples and embodiments described herein are for illustrative purposes only and that various modifications or changes in light thereof will be suggested to persons skilled in the art and are to be included within the spirit and purview of this application and scope of the appended claims. Thus, for example, reference throughout this specification to "one embodiment" or "an embodiment" means that a particular feature, structure or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the present invention. Thus, appearances of the phrases "in one embodiment" or "in an embodiment" in various places

throughout this specification are not necessarily all referring to the same embodiment. Furthermore, the particular features, structures or characteristics may be combined in any suitable manner, as would be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art from this disclosure, in one or more embodiments.

Similarly, it should be appreciated that in the above description of exemplary embodiments of the invention, various features of the invention are sometimes grouped together in a single embodiment, figure, or description thereof for the purpose of streamlining the disclosure and aiding in the understanding of one or more of the various inventive aspects. This method of disclosure, however, is not to be interpreted as reflecting an intention that the claimed invention requires more features than are expressly recited in each claim. Rather, as the following claims reflect, inventive aspects lie in less than all features of a single foregoing disclosed embodiment. Thus, the claims following the Detailed Description are hereby expressly incorporated into this Detailed Description, with each claim standing on its own as a separate embodiment of this invention.

I claim:

1. An apparatus for transporting pipe formed from a plurality of pipe segments, said apparatus comprising:

a frame;

a first mechanism supported by said frame and adapted to impart a first force approximately parallel to the longitudinal axis of one or more accepted first pipe segments, where said first force includes a frictional force;

a second mechanism supported by said frame at a location longitudinally disposed from accepted pipe segments of said first mechanism and adapted to impart a second force approximately parallel to the longitudinal axis of one or more accepted second pipe segments; and

a third mechanism disposed between said first mechanism and said second mechanism, where said third mechanism includes a device to couple the accepted first and second pipe segments together,

where said first mechanism and said second mechanism controllably impart said first force and second force in opposite directions to move accepted first and second pipe segments apart from each other, and

where said first mechanism and said second mechanism controllably impart said first force and second force towards each other with sufficient force to move accepted first and second pipe segments together.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, where said first mechanism includes two or more wheels having peripheral surfaces spaced to accept pipe segments therebetween.

3. The apparatus of claim 2, where said first mechanism further includes a tension mechanism to move at least one of said two or more wheels towards at least one other of said two or more wheels.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, where said second force includes a frictional force.

5. The apparatus of claim 4, where said second mechanism includes two or more wheels having peripheral surfaces spaced to accept pipe therebetween.

6. The apparatus of claim 5, where said second mechanism further includes a tension mechanism to move at least one of said two or more wheels towards at least one other of said two or more wheels.

7. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said apparatus further includes a vehicle to secure an end of the pipe and translate the pipe way from said first and second mechanism.

8. The apparatus of claim 7, where said first mechanism includes two or more wheels having peripheral surfaces spaced to accept pipe segments therebetween.

9. The apparatus of claim 8, where said first mechanism further includes a tension mechanism to move at least one of said two or more wheels towards at least one other of said two or more wheels.

10. The apparatus of claim 7, where said second force includes a frictional force.

11. The apparatus of claim 10, where said second mechanism includes two or more wheels having peripheral surfaces spaced to accept pipe segments therebetween.

12. The apparatus of claim 11, where said second mechanism further includes a tension mechanism to move at least one of said two or more wheels towards at least one other of said two or more wheels.

13. The apparatus of claim 1, where said first mechanism and said second mechanism accept pipe segments having a diameter ranging from a first diameter to a second diameter, where said second diameter is greater than said first diameter.

14. The apparatus of claim 13, where said first diameter is approximately 1 inch and where said second diameter is approximately 18 inches.

15. The apparatus of claim 13, where said first diameter is approximately 3 inches and where said second diameter is approximately 12 inches.

16. The apparatus of claim 1, where said first mechanism and said second mechanism accept pipe segments having a diameter between approximately 1 inch and approximately 18 inches.

17. The apparatus of claim 1, where said pipe segments are spline-coupled and where said device includes an actuator to insert a spline.

18. An apparatus for transporting pipe formed from a plurality of pipe segments, said apparatus comprising:

a frame;

a first mechanism supported by said frame and having two or more wheels, where at least one of said two or more wheels is a drive wheel, where each of said two or more wheels has a peripheral surfaces spaced to contact one or more first pipe segments placed therebetween, and where said drive wheels are controllably rotated to impart longitudinal forces on contacted first pipe segments; and

a second mechanism supported by said frame and having two or more wheels, where at least one of said two or more wheels is a drive wheel, where each of said two or more wheels has a peripheral surfaces spaced to contact one or more second pipe segments placed therebetween, and where said drive wheels are controllably rotated to impart longitudinal forces on contacted second pipe segments; and

a third mechanism disposed between said first mechanism and said second mechanism, where said third mechanism includes a device to couple the contacted first and second pipe segments together,

where said drive wheels of said first and second mechanism are controllably rotated in opposite directions to move adjacent contacted first and second pipe segments apart from each other, and

where said first mechanism and said second mechanism controllably rotate corresponding drive wheels in the same direction on the contacted first and second pipe segments with sufficient force to move contacted first and second pipe segments together.

19. The apparatus of claim 18, where said first mechanism further includes a tension mechanism to move at least one of said two or more wheels towards at least one other of said two or more wheels.

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20. The apparatus of claim 18, where said second mechanism further includes a tension mechanism to move at least one of said two or more wheels towards at least one other of said two or more wheels.

21. The apparatus of claim 18, wherein said apparatus further includes a vehicle to secure an end of the pipe and translate the pipe way from said first and second mechanism.

22. The apparatus of claim 18, where said first mechanism and said second mechanism accept pipe segments having a diameter ranging from a first diameter to a second diameter, where said second diameter is greater than said first diameter.

23. The apparatus of claim 22, where said first diameter is approximately 1 inch and where said second diameter is approximately 18 inches.

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24. The apparatus of claim 22, where said first diameter is approximately 3 inches and where said second diameter is approximately 12 inches.

25. The apparatus of claim 18, where said first mechanism and said second mechanism accept pipe segments having a diameter between approximately 1 inch and approximately 18 inches.

26. The apparatus of claim 18, where said pipe segments are spline-coupled and where said device includes an actuator to insert a spline.

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